



2009

Annual
Report
on
International
Religious
Freedom



United States
Department of State



WWW.STATE.GOV/G/DRL/RLS/IRF/

© AP Photos. Produced in coordination with the Bureau of Public Affairs, October 2009

PREFACE

Why the Reports are Prepared

The Department of State submits this report to the Congress in compliance with Section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. The law provides that the Secretary of State, with the assistance of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, shall transmit to Congress "an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom supplementing the most recent Human Rights Reports by providing additional detailed information with respect to matters involving international religious freedom."

How the Reports are Prepared

U.S. embassies prepare the initial drafts of these reports, gathering information from a variety of sources, including government and religious officials, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, human rights monitors, religious groups, and academics. This information gathering can be hazardous, and U.S. Foreign Service Officers regularly go to great lengths, under trying and sometimes dangerous conditions, to investigate reports of human rights abuse, to monitor elections, and to come to the aid of individuals at risk because of their religious beliefs.

The Office of International Religious Freedom collaborated in collecting and analyzing information for the country reports, drawing on the expertise of other Department of State offices, religious organizations, other non-governmental organizations, foreign government officials, representatives from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations and institutions, and experts from academia and the media. In compiling and editing the country reports, the Office of International Religious Freedom consulted with experts on issues of religious discrimination and persecution, religious leaders from a wide variety of faiths, and experts on legal matters. The office's guiding principle was to ensure that all relevant information was assessed as objectively, thoroughly, and fairly as possible.

A wide range of U.S. government departments, agencies, and offices will use the report to shape policy; conduct diplomacy; inform assistance, training, and other resource allocations; and help determine which countries have engaged in or

tolerated "particularly severe violations" of religious freedom, otherwise known as Countries of Particular Concern.

A Word on Usage

When this report states that a government "generally respected" the right of religious freedom over the reporting period, this phrase signifies that the government attempted to protect religious freedom in the fullest sense. "Generally respected" is thus the highest level of respect for religious freedom assigned by this report. The phrase "generally respected" is used because the protection and promotion of religious freedom is a dynamic endeavor; it cannot be stated categorically that any government fully respected this right over the reporting year, even in the best of circumstances.

Acknowledgements

The 2009 report covers the period from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009, and reflects a year of dedicated effort by hundreds of Foreign Service and Civil Service Officers in the Department of State and U.S. missions abroad. We thank the many Foreign Service Officers at our embassies and consulates abroad for monitoring and promoting religious freedom, and for chronicling in detail the status of religious liberty. In addition to their efforts, we acknowledge the diligent labor and tireless commitment to religious freedom of those within the Office of International Religious Freedom whose work made this report possible: Clarissa Adamson, Ali Aghaebrahim, Sylvia Ayub, Nasreen Badat, Judson Birdsall, M. A. Borst, Alexandra Brewer, Mark Carlson, Barbara Cates, Warren Cofsky, Courtney Cook, Graham Couturier, Kate Dailey, Doug Dearborn, Kurt Donnelly, Brian Fabbi, Augustine Fahey, Nathan Godsey, A. T. Gombis, Nancy Hewett, Olivia Hilton, Nathan Hitchen, Victor Huser, Alicia Juskewycz, Emilie Kao, Justin Kern, Sarah Kim, Peter Kovach, Gwendolyn Mack, Safia Mohamoud, Fidel Mahangel, Alexander McLaren, Joannella Morales, Sarah Nelson, Aaron Pina, David Rodearmel, Lana Salih, Tarika Sethi, Andrea Sidari, Lauren Smith, and Abdelnour Zaiback. The work of all of these individuals advances the cause of freedom, ensures accuracy in our reporting, and brings hope to repressed people around the world.

Cover Photo Credits

All cover images are copyright AP Photos.

Members of the Jewish priestly caste wear prayer shawls as they perform the tri-annual blessing of the Jewish people by the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, 1996. (AP PHOTO/Eyal Warshavsky)

A Palestinian Muslim worshipper prays inside the Dome of the Rock Mosque during the second Friday prayers of the holy fasting month of Ramadan 2007. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

South Africa's Soweto Gospel Choir, performs in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2007. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)

A woman prays in the St. Peter's church in Wadowice, southern Poland, 2005. (AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski)

A Hindu child makes offerings during the Hindu festival of Deepavali at a temple in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2006. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

A Muslim offers a prayer outside a mosque during the fasting month of Ramadan in Kuala Lumpur, 2002. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

A young Thai novice Buddhist monk lights a candle in Bangkok, Thailand, 2005. (AP Photo/David Longstreath)

A man offers prayers at the Peace Park before the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki, southwestern Japan 2005. (AP Photo/Junji Kurokawa)

A nun of Missionaries of Charity prays beside the tomb of Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India, 2003. (AP Photo/Bikas Das)

Released by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor, Office of International Religious Freedom in coordination with the Bureau of Public Affairs, October 2009

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together.

--President Barack Obama

In his landmark speech at Cairo University, President Obama articulated his vision for "a new beginning" between the United States and Muslims around the world — a relationship based on mutual interest and mutual respect. Building stronger ties, he said, requires "a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another, and to seek common ground." This renewed engagement compels us not to shirk from contentious issues but rather to "face these tensions squarely" and work as partners to solve problems.

The Department of State offers its *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* in this spirit of dialogue and cooperation. Religion is a global phenomenon; all countries face the challenges and opportunities religious diversity poses, and no country has a perfect record on religious freedom. As Americans we are rightfully proud of our own heritage of religious liberty; countless religious refugees have fled persecution in their homelands and found sanctuary on our shores. But we are also painfully aware of our nation's past mistreatment of certain minority groups. From the public execution of Quakers in mid-17th century Massachusetts Bay Colony to the expulsion of Mormons from Missouri in 1838-39 to the discrimination many Muslim Americans felt following 9/11, our society has long struggled to accommodate its religious diversity. Yet we have learned from experience that we are enriched by a pluralism that is endorsed by government and embraced by society. Through the *Annual Report* and other diplomatic efforts, we encourage all nations to protect religious freedom and promote religious tolerance for all groups and individuals. As President Obama said in Cairo:

"People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul. This tolerance is essential for religion to thrive, but it's being challenged in many different ways."

The *Annual Report* surveys those "many different ways" in 198 countries and territories. Covering both deteriorations and improvements in the status of governmental and societal respect for religious freedom, the *Annual Report* aims to be comprehensive and balanced, considering the diversity and dynamism of the world's religious traditions and socio-political contexts. Despite the varied

conditions religious communities encounter around the globe, the principled and practical reasons for safeguarding their freedom remain the same: religious freedom is a fundamental right, a social good, a source of stability, and a key to international security. President Obama touched on issues related to each of these four reasons in remarks given throughout this past year.

First, religious freedom is the birthright of all people, regardless of their faith or lack thereof. Enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments, the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate one's faith must be respected by all societies and governments. The United States takes this obligation seriously. "America will always stand," the President said in his Ramadan message to Muslims, "for the universal rights of all people to speak their mind, practice their religion, contribute fully to society, and have confidence in the rule of law."

Second, religious freedom empowers communities of faith to advance the common good. On balance, freedom tends to channel the convictions and passions of faith into acts of service and positive engagement in the public square. In the United States scores of religious groups, from the largest denominations to the smallest local congregations, have put their faith into practice and helped to build a more just and compassionate society. In announcing the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, President Obama said, "There is a force for good greater than government. It is an expression of faith, this yearning to give back, this hungering for a purpose larger than our own, that reveals itself not simply in places of worship but in senior centers and shelters, schools, and hospitals."

Third, religious freedom is not only a human right and social good, it is imperative for national stability. Authoritarian regimes that repress religious groups and ideas in the name of stability create the very conditions that subvert their stated goals. Repression radicalizes. Coercive and arbitrary interference in peaceful religious practice can harden resentment against the state and lead some to separatism or insurgency. By contrast, "freedom of religion and expression," the President remarked to the Turkish Parliament, "lead to a strong and vibrant civil society that only strengthens the state... An enduring commitment to the rule of law is the only way to achieve the security that comes from justice for all people."

Fourth, in an age when terrorist groups export their hatred around the world, religious freedom is critical to international security. As the President noted in Cairo, "when violent extremists operate in one stretch of mountains, people are

endangered across an ocean." Governments must ensure that their policies on religion do not have negative international consequences. Regimes that manipulate religion or marginalize minority groups exacerbate interreligious tension and throw fuel on the fire of radical religious ideologies. Environments of robust religious freedom, on the other hand, foster communal harmony and embolden voices of moderation to openly refute extremists on religious grounds.

In light of the benefits of religious freedom and the dangers of denying it, the United States promotes this universal right as a core objective of its foreign policy. The *Annual Report* is the flagship tool in this effort. It informs our bilateral policies and diplomatic strategies, shines a spotlight on abusive governments, and gives hope to millions who suffer on account of their faith. The *Report* also serves as a rich resource of detailed data on religion in society, and we greatly value the contributions of activists and scholars who make use of our reports and enrich our understanding of the complex causes and effects of religious freedom and persecution. We welcome further analysis using our reports, as well as critiques of U.S. domestic and international religious freedom policies. It is our hope that the *Annual Report* stimulates global dialogue and inspires cooperative action leading to a more just and secure world.

Michael Posner

Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report

The *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* records the status of respect for religious freedom in all countries during the period from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009. The *Annual Report's* primary focus is on the actions of governments, including those that contribute to religious repression or tolerate violence against religious minorities as well as those that protect and promote religious freedom. Each country report contains sections covering the country's religious demography; government respect for religious freedom (including the legal and policy framework, restrictions on religious freedom, abuses of religious freedom, and improvements and positive developments); societal respect for religious freedom; and U.S. Government policy and actions. We strive to report fairly and accurately, with sensitivity to the complexity of religious freedom in varied settings.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act) designates the promotion of religious freedom for all persons as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. U.S. advocacy for religious freedom is grounded in our commitment to advance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. The vast majority of the world's population professes some religious belief or identification. The right to believe or not to believe, without fear of government interference or restriction, provides an essential foundation for human dignity, robust civil society, and sustainable democracy. This principle holds a central place in American culture, values, and history. It is also a global concern; both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights articulate the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.

The IRF Act also provides the mandate for this report and prescribes the principal topics for this Executive Summary: following an introductory overview of challenges to religious freedom, Part I outlines the religious freedom situations in selected countries, Part II addresses U.S. actions in designated countries of particular concern (CPCs), and Part III discusses improvements and positive developments, with a special section on efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding.

State-Sponsored Challenges to Religious Freedom

Religious freedom can be restricted in a variety of ways, from the overt to the subtle. The five categories below provide an analytic framework for recognizing the range of limitations on religious freedom.

- 1) Authoritarian governments. The most severe abuses take place in certain strict authoritarian regimes that seek to control all religious thought and expression as part of a more comprehensive state control of expression and civic life. These regimes regard some groups as enemies of the state because of their religious beliefs or because they undermine unquestioned loyalty to the state. Some governments cite political security concerns as a pretext to repress peaceful religious practice. This report distinguishes between expression of legitimate political grievances by groups of religious believers and misuse of religion to advocate and undertake violence against other groups or the state.
- 2) Hostility toward minorities. Serious abuses occur where there is state hostility toward minority or non-approved religious groups. While not exerting full control over these groups, some governments intimidate and harass religious minorities and tolerate societal abuses against them. In severe cases, governments may demand that minority adherents renounce their faith or force them to relocate or even flee the country. This report takes careful note of the relationships between religious identity and ethnicity, especially in cases in which a government dominated by a majority ethno-religious group suppressed the religious expression of minority groups. Also detailed in this report are instances in which governments were hostile to a minority religious group because of the group's real or perceived political ideology or affiliation.
- 3) Failure to address societal intolerance. Some states fail to address forces of intolerance against certain religious groups. In these countries, laws may discourage religious discrimination or persecution, but officials fail to prevent attacks, harassment, or other harmful acts against certain individuals or religious groups. Protecting religious freedom requires more than having good laws and policies in place. Governments also have the responsibility to work at all levels to prevent abuses, to bring abusers to justice, to provide redress to victims when appropriate, and to proactively foster an environment of respect and tolerance for all people.
- 4) Institutionalized bias. Governments sometimes restrict religious freedom by enacting discriminatory legislation or taking concrete action to favor majority religions. These circumstances often result from historical dominance by a majority religious group and can result in institutionalized bias against new or

historic minority religious communities. This report highlights instances in which government endorsement of a particular interpretation of the majority religion resulted in restrictions on adherents of that religion who follow a different interpretation.

5) Illegitimacy. Some governments discriminate against specific groups by identifying them as dangerous or illegitimate because they are regarded as dangerous to individuals or societal order, describing the groups with terms such as "cults" or "sects," thereby perpetuating the stigmatization of the groups and encouraging or implicitly condoning acts of violence against them. This practice is relatively common even in countries where religious freedom is otherwise respected.

Multilateral, Global, and Regional Challenges to Religious Freedom

In addition to these country-by-country concerns, the wide spectrum of efforts to undermine the right to religious freedom extends to multilateral, regional, and global fora. For instance, over the past decade, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an inter-governmental organization comprising 57 states with majority or significant Muslim populations, has worked through the United Nations (UN) to advance the concept of "defamation of religions" by introducing annual resolutions on this subject at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly. While the United States deplors actions that exhibit disrespect for particular religious traditions, including Islam, we do not agree with the "defamation of religions" concept because it is inconsistent with the freedoms of religion and expression.

The United States understands the primary concern of the resolution to be the negative stereotyping of members of religious groups, particularly minority groups, and the contribution of such stereotypes to disrespect and discrimination. The United States shares concerns about the impact of negative stereotypes and believes that such stereotyping, particularly when promoted by community, religious, or government leaders, contributes to disrespect, discrimination, and in some cases, to violence. The United States, however, believes the best way for governments to address these issues is to develop robust legal regimes to address acts of discrimination and bias-inspired crime; to condemn hateful ideology and proactively reach out to all religious communities, especially minority groups; and to defend vigorously the rights of individuals to practice their religion freely and to exercise their freedom of expression.

The forcible return of individuals from another country to face persecution or abuse in their home country in retribution for their religious activism is also of grave concern to the United States. During the reporting period, the Government of China reportedly sought the forcible return of several Muslims living in other countries, including Syria; during previous periods it had done so with Muslims living in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Some had reportedly protested restrictions on the Hajj and encouraged other Muslims to pray and fast during Ramadan. There were credible reports that the Government of China tortured and, in some cases, executed individuals who had been forcibly returned, including some who advocated for religious freedom. Similarly, the Government of Uzbekistan continued to pursue the extradition of suspected Uzbek religious extremists from third countries, particularly from Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine, including those who had sought asylum. During the reporting period, at least two individuals seeking political asylum in Kyrgyzstan were forcibly extradited to Uzbekistan and imprisoned on religious extremism charges.

PART I: RESTRICTIONS, ABUSES AND CONCERNS

This section summarizes overall conditions during the reporting period in some countries where violations of religious freedom have been noteworthy. Some of these countries have also seen some positive developments, and these are highlighted in Part III. Additional information can be found in the country reports.

Afghanistan

The Constitution states that Islam is the "religion of the state" and that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." In 2004, the Constitution accorded Shi'a and Sunni Islam equal recognition. It proclaims that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law." The Government took limited steps to increase religious freedom; however, serious problems remained. In April 2009 President Karzai signed a controversial law limiting the rights of women from the Shi'a minority. International partners of Afghanistan objected strongly to the law. The President agreed to suspend enactment of the law until the Ministry of Justice had reviewed and amended it. The review process was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Although the Government and political leaders aspire to a national environment that respects the right to religious freedom, the residual effects of years of jihad against the former Soviet Union, Taliban rule, civil strife, popular suspicion regarding outside influence of foreigners, and still weak democratic institutions hindered the realization of this aspiration. Intolerance was manifested in harassment and occasional violence against religious minorities

and Muslims perceived as not respecting Islamic strictures. Within the Muslim population, relations among the different sects continued to be difficult. Non-Muslim minority groups, including Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, continued to face incidents of discrimination and persecution. Many citizens understand conversion as contravening the tenets of Islam and Shari'a, and most local Christians do not publicly state their beliefs or gather openly to worship.

Azerbaijan

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. There were changes to the Constitution approved during the reporting period, however, that undermined religious freedom. On March 18, 2009, a national referendum approved a series of amendments to the Constitution; two amendments limit the spreading and propagandizing of religion. On May 8, the Milli Majlis (Parliament) passed an amended Law on Freedom of Religion, signed by the President on May 29, which could result in a more restrictive system of registration for religious groups. In spite of these developments, the Government continued to respect the religious freedom of the majority of citizens, with some notable exceptions for members of religions considered non-traditional. Both Muslim and non-traditional Christian groups reportedly experienced monitoring as well as instances of harassment and detention. There were mosque closures as well as State and locally sponsored raids on evangelical Protestant religious groups.

Brunei

Government respect for religious freedom deteriorated during the reporting period as the Government restricted religious freedom for non-Muslims. Non-Muslims were prohibited from receiving religious education in private religious schools, which had previously been allowed. Non-Muslims also faced social and, at times, official pressure to conform to Islamic guidelines on behavior. The Government maintained a ban on a number of groups it considered "deviant." Government policies generally discouraged the population from being exposed to religions besides Islam. Across denominational lines, non-Muslim religious leaders stated that they were subject to undue influence and duress and some were threatened with fines and/or imprisonment. Active monitoring of churches and disruption of supply shipments and mail were reported. Laws and regulations generally limited access to religious literature, places of worship, and public religious gatherings for non-Muslims. The Government continued to favor the propagation of Shafi'i beliefs and practices, as well as the Malay Islamic Monarchy belief system, particularly through public events and the education system. Muslims remained subject to the Government's interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law).

Burma

The 2008 Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, it also grants broad exceptions that allow the regime to restrict those rights at will. Most adherents of registered religions were permitted to worship as they chose, but the Government continued to infiltrate and monitor activities of virtually all organizations, including religious ones. It systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom. Many of the Buddhist monks arrested in the violent crackdown that followed the pro-democracy demonstrations of September 2007, including prominent activist monk U Gambira, remained in prison serving long sentences. The Government actively promoted Theravada Buddhism, particularly among minority ethnic groups. Although there were no new reports of forced conversions of non-Buddhists, the Government applied pressure on students and poor youth to convert to Buddhism. Adherence to Buddhism remains generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior government and military ranks. Anti-Muslim violence continued, as did the close monitoring of Muslims' activities. Restrictions on Christians and other non-Buddhist minority groups also continued throughout the country.

China

The Constitution protects only "normal religious activities," and officials have wide latitude to interpret the meaning of "normal." Citizens do not have the ability to bring legal action based on the Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom. The Government officially restricts legal religious practice to the five (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations." The treatment of religious groups varied significantly among different religions and different locations. During the reporting period, officials continued to scrutinize and in some cases interfere with the activities of religious and spiritual groups. In some areas government officials violated the rights of members of unregistered Protestant and Catholic groups, Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and members of groups the Government determined to be "evil religions," especially the Falun Gong. The Government strongly opposed the profession of loyalty to religious leadership outside the country, most notably the Pope and the Dalai Lama. Government officials asked some unregistered Protestant house churches in Beijing to stop meeting during the 2008 Olympic Games.

China - Tibetan Autonomous Region and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

The Government's repression of religious freedom remained severe in Tibetan areas and in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Religious adherents in the XUAR, the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), and other

Tibetan areas suffered severe restrictions on religious activity, as a consequence of the Government's tendency to conflate concerns about separatism and religious extremism with peaceful expressions of religious beliefs and political views. In the XUAR, the Government's concerns also included terrorism. After the March 2008 protests in the TAR and other Tibetan regions, the Government harshly criticized the Dalai Lama and accused him of instigating the protests. Ethnic Tibetans and Uighurs had difficulty obtaining passports from the Government, limiting their ability to travel abroad for religious purposes. Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns also reported that they were frequently denied registration at hotels, particularly during sensitive times, including the period around the Beijing Olympics.

Cuba

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, the Government continued to assert itself over all aspects of social life, including religious expression. Religious groups complained about widespread surveillance and infiltration by state security agents. Various religious groups reported fewer restrictions on politically sensitive expression, the ability to hold religious activities, increased capacity to conduct charitable and community service projects, fewer import and travel restrictions, permission to repair buildings, and significant increases in membership. The Government continued to maintain strict controls on the construction of new buildings for religious purposes, and permission was difficult to obtain. The Government does not permit private schools, including religious schools.

Egypt

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion, and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are the primary source for legislation. The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government declined somewhat during the reporting period, based on the failure to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of increased incidents of sectarian violence. There were some positive developments, however, including actions by the courts and the Ministry of Interior that opened the door for the possibility that all of the country's Baha'is would eventually be issued national identification documents that contain a dash or the term "other" in the religious affiliation field. The Government continued to sponsor "reconciliation sessions" following sectarian attacks, which generally precluded the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and prevented their recourse to the judicial system for restitution. This practice contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged repetition of the

assaults. Members of non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Government generally worshipped without harassment. Christians, however, and members of the Baha'i Faith--which is not recognized by the Government--face personal and collective discrimination in many areas. The Government detained members of Islamic religious minority groups, including Quranists and Shi'a, and detained and harassed some converts from Islam to Christianity and pressured them to revert to Islam. One Christian convert told U.S. officials that government authorities had raped her. A court sentenced a Coptic priest to five years of hard labor for officiating at a wedding between a Copt and a convert from Islam who allegedly presented false identification documentation. There continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report, and Egypt's quasi-governmental National Council on Human Rights expressed concern in its fifth report, released in May 2009, over growing sectarian tension, including the burning of an unlicensed Coptic Church and of homes belonging to Baha'is.

Eritrea

The Constitution, ratified by the National Assembly in 1997, provides for religious freedom; however, the Government has yet to implement the Constitution. Although the Government requires religious groups to register, since 2002 it has not approved any registrations beyond the country's four principal religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. The Government's record on religious freedom remained poor during the reporting period. The Government failed to approve religious groups that fulfilled the registration requirements, and arrested persons during religious gatherings. The Government continued to harass and detain members of unapproved religious groups and retained substantial control over the four approved religious groups, requiring them to submit a list of religious leaders for enrollment in military/national service. The Government held religious prisoners in harsh conditions for long periods and without due process. There continued to be reports of torture of religious detainees and forced recantations of faith by some adherents of unregistered religious groups held in detention as a precondition of their release. During the reporting period, there were reliable reports that authorities detained without charges several hundred members of unregistered religious groups. Reports indicated there were more than 3,000 Christians from unregistered groups detained in prison. Citizens generally were tolerant of one another in the practice of their religion, with the exception of societal attitudes toward Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal groups.

Fiji

Prior to its abrogation in April 2009, the Constitution expressly provided for freedom of religion. The country's current laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the role of religion continued to be politically contentious. There was a decline in the status of government respect for religious freedom during the reporting period as a result of a nationwide "Christian crusade" directed by the Police Commissioner. All police officers and their families, regardless of their religious beliefs, were required to attend evangelistic rallies at all police divisions and major police stations in the country. There were reports of Hindu and Muslim police officers joining the commissioner's church for fear of being denied promotions or losing their jobs. The Police Force asserted that the Christian crusade was highly successful, resulting in a 50 percent decrease in crime, and would continue.

India

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice. Some state and local governments imposed limits on this freedom, however. Although the vast majority of citizens of every religious group lived in peaceful coexistence, some organized societal attacks against minority religious groups occurred. State police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly to effectively counter such attacks. Religious extremists committed numerous terrorist attacks throughout the country during the reporting period, including the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai that targeted luxury hotels, a crowded railway station, a Jewish center, a hospital, and restaurants. Violence erupted in August 2008 in Orissa after individuals affiliated with left-wing Maoist extremists killed a Hindu religious leader in Kandhamal, one of the country's poorest districts. According to government statistics, 40 persons died and 134 were injured. Although most victims were Christians, the underlying causes that led to the violence have complex ethnic, economic, religious, and political roots related to land ownership and government-reserved employment and educational benefits. The police arrested 1,200 persons and registered more than 1,000 criminal cases. On April 21, 2009, police arrested Maoist leader P. Rama Rao in connection with the murder of the Hindu leader. According to several independent accounts, an estimated 3,200 refugees remained in relief camps, down from 24,000 in the immediate aftermath of the violence. Numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period, including cases in connection with the 2002 Gujarat violence, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and more recent attacks against Christians. Some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity. In general, India's democratic system, open society, independent legal

institutions, vibrant civil society, and press all provided mechanisms to address violations of religious freedom when they did occur.

Indonesia

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, ongoing government restrictions, particularly among unrecognized religions and sects of the recognized religions considered "deviant," were significant exceptions. In some cases, however, the Government tolerated discrimination against and the abuse of religious minorities by societal groups and private actors. Some groups used violence and intimidation to close at least nine churches and 12 Ahmadiyya mosques, and many perpetrators were not brought to justice. Even though the central Government holds authority over religious matters, it did not try to overturn any local laws that restricted rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Members of minority religious groups continued to experience some official discrimination in the form of administrative difficulties, often in the context of civil registration of marriages and births or the issuance of identity cards.

Iran

The Constitution provides that "other Islamic denominations are to be accorded full respect" and recognizes the country's pre-Islamic religious groups--Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews--as "protected" religious minorities. Article 4 of the Constitution states that all laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. Despite constitutional guarantees, in practice those who are not Shi'a Muslims faced substantial discrimination. Respect for religious freedom in the country continued to deteriorate. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as for Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community. Reports of government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Baha'i religious groups reported arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, expulsion from universities, and confiscation of property. Government-controlled broadcast and print media intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly Baha'is, during the reporting period. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued a virulent anti-Semitic campaign, questioning the existence and scope of the Holocaust. Sufis faced an increasing repression campaign including arbitrary arrest and detention, confiscation of property, and defamatory attacks in newspapers and in sermons by Shi'a clerics. The Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing by some Christian groups by closely monitoring their activities, closing some churches, and arresting

Christian converts. Laws based on religious affiliation continued to be used to stifle freedom of expression, including through imprisonment of public figures.

Iraq

The Constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Government generally endorsed these rights, but violence by terrorists, extremists, and criminal gangs restricted the free exercise of religion and posed a significant threat to the country's vulnerable religious minorities. Radical Islamic elements from outside the Government exerted pressure on individuals and groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islam's precepts; sectarian violence, including attacks on clergy and places of worship, hampered the ability to practice religion freely. The Government's growing will and capacity to challenge its militant opponents resulted in a decrease in the overall level of violence and the Government became increasingly successful in restoring security, in a generally nonsectarian manner, throughout the country. Since 2003 the Government has generally not engaged in the persecution of any religious group, calling instead for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities. The overall magnitude of sectarian violence declined during the reporting period, but numerous incidents occurred. The general lawlessness that permitted criminal gangs, terrorists, and insurgents to victimize citizens with impunity affected persons of all ethnicities and religious groups, and the mass-casualty attacks primarily targeted the majority Shi'a population. Very few of the perpetrators of violence committed against Christians and other religious minorities in the country have been punished; arrests following a murder or other crime are rare.

Israel

The Israeli Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for freedom of worship and the Government generally respected this right in practice. While there is no constitution, government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion. The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty refers to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which provides for the protection of religious freedom. In addition, numerous Supreme Court rulings incorporate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including their religious freedom provisions, into the country's body of law. The Declaration describes the country as a Jewish state, establishing Judaism as the dominant religion while also promising full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation, and the Basic Law describes the country as a "Jewish and democratic state." Government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion,

although governmental and legal discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued. Governmental allocations of state resources favored Orthodox (including Modern and National Religious streams of Orthodoxy) and ultra-Orthodox (sometimes referred to as "Haredi") Jewish religious groups and institutions. Some individuals and groups committed abusive and discriminatory practices against Israeli-Arab Muslims, evangelical Christians, and Messianic Jews (persons who identify as Jews and follow Jewish traditions but believe Jesus was the Messiah), which continued at an elevated level. Relations among religious and ethnic groups--between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism--often were strained during the reporting period. This was due primarily to the continuing Israel-Palestinian conflict and the Government's unequal treatment of non-Orthodox Jews, including the Government's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews. Tensions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians were inflamed further during and in the aftermath of Israel's December 2008-January 2009 military campaign "Operation Cast Lead" against Hamas in the Gaza strip.

Occupied Territories

The Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have a constitution but has stated that the Palestinian Basic Law functions as its temporary constitution. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation, but it provides for freedom of belief, worship and the performance of religious rites, unless they violate public order or morality. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law and that basic human rights and liberties shall be protected. Israel exercised varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories, and the Israeli Government generally respected the right to freedom of religion there during the reporting period. Despite these provisions for freedom of religion in the PA's Basic Law and the Israeli Government's Declaration of Independence, religious freedom restrictions continued in the Occupied Territories. In particular, Israel's strict closure policies and the separation barrier constructed by the Government of Israel had the effect of severely restricting the ability of Palestinian Muslims and Christians to reach places of worship and to practice their religious rites. Israeli law also restricted the ability of Israeli Jews to reach places of worship in areas under Palestinian control. The status of respect for religious freedom by the PA was unchanged during the reporting period, although problems persisted. The Gaza Strip remained under the control of Hamas during the reporting period, and the PA was therefore unable to

enforce respect for religious freedom or address reports of harassment of religious groups in the Gaza Strip. Christians and Muslims generally enjoyed good relations, although tensions existed. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews remained high, and continuing violence heightened those tensions.

Laos

During the reporting period, the overall status of respect for religious freedom did not significantly change. As was the case during previous reporting periods, officials in urban areas tended to show more acceptance of a variety of religious practices than those in rural areas. The law does not recognize a state religion; however, the Government's financial support and promotion of Buddhism, along with its willingness to exempt Buddhism from a number of restrictions, gave the religion an elevated status. Authorities in some of the country's 17 provinces continued to be suspicious of non-Buddhist religious communities and displayed intolerance for minority religious practice, particularly Protestant groups, whether or not they were officially recognized. Officials generally respected the constitutionally guaranteed rights of members of most religious groups to worship, albeit within strict constraints imposed by the Government. Some local officials, however, reportedly interfered with the right of Protestants to worship in a number of places, particularly in Luang Namtha and Bolikhamsai provinces. Arrests and detentions of Protestants reportedly occurred in Luang Namtha, Phongsali, and Savannakhet provinces. At the end of the reporting period, there were two known religious prisoners, both Protestants. A number of other Protestants were being detained for reasons other than their religion, although religion was alleged to have been a contributing factor in their arrests. Local officials also reportedly pressured Protestants in some locations to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages in Bolikhamsai, Houaphan, Salavan, Luang Prabang, Attapeu, Oudomsai, and Luang Namtha provinces.

Malaysia

The Constitution of Malaysia provides for religious freedom; however, other constitutional provisions designate Islam as "the religion of the Federation," define all ethnic Malays as Muslim, give the Government authority to regulate Islamic religious affairs, and prohibit the propagation of other faiths among Muslims. In general, there were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Malaysia maintains a dual legal system with both secular and Shari'a courts, the latter of which have jurisdiction over the Muslim population in certain civil matters. Shari'a courts generally prohibited those officially registered as Muslims from legally converting to another faith. Those who attempted conversion were deemed "apostates" and sometimes sent to

religious "rehabilitation" centers, where they received coerced religious instruction. The Government maintained a list of 56 "deviant" Islamic sects, and members of these and other banned groups may also be subject to "rehabilitation." Officials at the state level sometimes interfered with mosque activity by using mosques to convey political messages, preventing certain imams from speaking, and overseeing the content of sermons. Religious minorities remained generally free to practice their beliefs. Nevertheless, over the past several years, many have expressed concern that the civil court system has gradually ceded jurisdiction to Shari'a courts, particularly in areas of family law involving disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims. Religious minorities continued to face alleged violations of property rights and limitations on religious expression. The Hindu community continued to express concern about the demolition of Hindu temples.

Nigeria

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The Constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting a state religion or giving preferential treatment to any religious or ethnic community, but the Constitution also provides that states may establish courts based on common law or customary law systems. Twelve northern states use Shari'a courts to adjudicate criminal and civil matters for Muslims and common law and customary law courts to adjudicate cases involving non-Muslims. The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although local political actors stoked sectarian violence with impunity, occasionally using religion as a catalyst. Violence, tension, and hostility between Christian and Muslim communities increased, as political and socioeconomic conflicts often divided persons along religious lines and were expressed in the targeting of religious symbols and spaces. Sectarian violence, exacerbated by indigene/settler laws, discriminatory employment practices, livelihood differences, and resource competition, was particularly acute in the Middle Belt and served to heighten tensions between religious groups, even in parts of the country that did not experience the violence. Religious differences often paralleled and exacerbated differences between ethnic groups. While the law prohibited religious discrimination in employment and other practices, some private businesses continued to discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnicity in their hiring practices. In many communities, Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced ostracism by members of their former religion.

North Korea

Although the Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," genuine religious freedom does not exist, and there was no change in the extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. The Government severely restricted religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except that which was supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. Some foreigners who have visited the country stated that services at state-authorized churches appeared staged and contained political content supportive of the regime. The 2008 Korean Institute for National Unification White Paper indicated that the regime used authorized religious entities for external propaganda and political purposes, and that citizens were strictly barred from entering places of worship. Defectors reported the regime increased its investigation, repression, and persecution of unauthorized religious groups in recent years. Despite these restrictions, reports indicated contacts with religious personnel both inside the country and across the border in China appeared to be increasing. In June 2009 South Korean activists reported that Ri Hyon Ok was publicly executed for distributing Bibles in the city of Ryongchon near the Chinese border. She was allegedly accused of spying and organizing dissidents. These claims could not be independently verified. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 persons were believed to be held in political prison camps in remote areas, some for religious reasons. Prison conditions are harsh; torture and starvation are common. Refugees and defectors who had been in prison stated that prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally were treated worse than other inmates.

Pakistan

The country is an Islamic republic; Islam is the state religion, and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islamic principles. Despite some positive steps to improve the treatment of religious minorities during the reporting period, discussed in Part III, serious problems remained. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different religious belief fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities. Specific laws that discriminate against religious minorities include anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws that provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and legal bars to the practice of its religious beliefs. Members of minority Islamic sects also claimed governmental discrimination. Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interests of the

"glory of Islam." Relations among religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread, and societal violence against such groups occurred. Non-governmental actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations. A domestic insurgency led by Sunni Taliban elements increased acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities and exacerbated existing sectarian tensions. Imposition of extremist religious views on the majority Muslims loomed large as a threat throughout the reporting period due to the increased activity of an extremist insurgency, particularly in the Swat Valley. In various incidents, Muslims with liberal views, particularly women, were asked to follow a strict version of Islam and were threatened with dire consequences if they did not abide by it.

Russia

Although the Government generally respected freedom of religion for most of the population, authorities imposed restrictions on certain religious minorities and did not always respect separation of church and state and the equality of all religions before the law. Vague legislation to counter "extremism" has had a detrimental effect on religious freedom. There were indications that security services treated the leadership and literature of some minority religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, as security threats. Alexander Dvorkin, an outspoken proponent of categorizing minority religious groups as extremist cults and "sects," was elected to head the Council of Experts that makes recommendations on designating these religious groups. Societal attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups were negative in many regions, and there were manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as hostility toward Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Instances of religiously motivated violence continued, although often it was difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church occasionally disseminated negative publications and held protest meetings against religions considered nontraditional, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some Russian Orthodox Church clergy, including Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, publicly stated opposition to the expansion of the presence of some non-Orthodox Christian denominations, though other prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Many religious groups had difficulty acquiring land or permits to build houses of worship, and nontraditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship.

Saudi Arabia

Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under Saudi law and it is severely restricted in practice. The Government confirmed that, as a matter of policy, it guarantees and protects the right to private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious services. This right was not always respected in practice and is not defined in law. The King's official title is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," reflecting the importance the royal family attaches to upholding Islam within the country as a central pillar of its legitimacy, both domestically and within the global Muslim community. The deep connection between the Al-Saud family and the religious establishment results in significant pressure on the state and society to adhere to the official Saudi interpretation of Islam and conservative societal norms. Some Muslims who do not adhere to this interpretation faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of places of worship and community centers. The largest group affected was the Shi'a. Moreover, the public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited, and the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) continued to conduct raids on private non-Muslim religious gatherings. Although the Government also confirmed its stated policy to protect the right to possess and use personal religious materials, it did not provide for this right in law or practice. There were fewer charges of harassment and abuse at the hands of the CPVPV than in previous years, but incidents of CPVPV excesses continued to cause many non-Muslims to worship in secret, for fear of the police and CPVPV. Saudi textbooks continued to contain overtly intolerant statements against Jews and Christians and subtly intolerant statements against Shi'a and other religious groups, notwithstanding Government efforts to review educational materials to remove or revise such statements.

Somalia

Although the Transitional Federal Charter provides for religious freedom, there were limits on the extent to which this right was respected in practice. The Charter establishes Islam as the national religion, and proselytizing for any religion other than Islam is strictly prohibited. Moreover, statutes and regulations provide no effective recourse for violations of religious freedom. The independent regions of Somaliland and Puntland establish Islam as the official religion. On May 10, 2009, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) ratified legislation to implement Shari'a law nationwide. In practice, the TFG does not have the capacity or mechanisms to implement the legislation uniformly. The TFG generally did not enforce legal protections of religious freedom. There was a decline in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, primarily as a result of

extremist militias taking control over significant territory in the country. Militia groups, particularly those associated with the U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization al-Shabaab, often imposed through violence a strict interpretation of Islam on communities under their control. In religiously motivated violence, al-Shabaab destroyed the tombs of revered Sufi clerics and killed clerics, civilians, and government officials of Sufi orientation. In targeted assassinations, members of these extremist groups killed TFG officials and allies they denounced as non-Muslims or apostates. There were also reports that individuals who do not practice Islam experienced discrimination, violence, and detention because of their religious beliefs. There were no public places of worship for non-Muslims in the country. A political process to establish peace and stability in the country continued.

Sudan

The Interim National Constitution (INC) provided for freedom of religion throughout the country; however, the INC enshrined Shari'a as a source of legislation in the north, and the official laws and policies of the Government of National Unity (GNU) favor Islam in the north. The Constitution of Southern Sudan provides for freedom of religion in the south, and other laws and policies of the Government of South Sudan contributed to the generally free practice of religion in the 10 states of the south. Although the GNU generally did not vigorously enforce its strictest restrictions on religious freedom, it generally did not respect religious plurality and continued to place some restrictions on Christians in the north. Even so, unlike in prior reporting periods, Christian churches in the north reported that they held regular religious services and large holiday celebrations without government interference. There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and religious prejudices remained prevalent throughout the country.

Tajikistan

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, but legislation and governmental decrees contradict this right. The Government continued to promote secularism and allowed religious practice only under tight controls. Respect for religious freedom continued to decline during the reporting period. The Government passed a new religion law that includes significant restrictions on religious expression, particularly among the country's majority Muslim population, and it continued to use the registration process to hinder, influence, or intimidate religious organizations and communities. The Government expanded its efforts to control virtually all aspects of religious life, and government officials actively monitored religious groups, institutions, and figures. Government policies

reflected a concern about Islamic extremism, and government officials used these concerns to justify imposing restrictions and engaging in surveillance.

Turkey

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restricted these rights. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government continued to impose limitations on Muslim and other religious groups and significant restrictions on individuals' Islamic religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Islamic religious headscarves in government offices as well as in public schools. Minority religious groups faced difficulties in worshipping, registering with the Government, and training their members. Societal threats against non-Muslims created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Many Christians, Baha'is, and heterodox Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and some elements of society continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments.

Turkmenistan

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to restrict the free practice of religion. There were small improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, but troubling developments in the treatment of some registered and unregistered groups continued. All groups must register to gain legal status; unregistered religious activity is illegal and may be punished by administrative fines. Several religious groups remained unable to register, and the Government restricted registered groups' ability to own property, print or import religious materials, and host foreign guests. There were reports of raids and arbitrary detentions involving Jehovah's Witnesses.

Uzbekistan

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, the 1998 Religion Law restricts many rights only to registered religious groups and limits which groups may register. Respect for religious freedom declined in several respects during the reporting period. The Government's campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups

suspected of extremist sentiments or activities continued; alleged members were arrested and sentenced to lengthy jail terms. The number of individuals imprisoned for membership in extremist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir appeared to decrease for the second year in a row; however, the Government appeared to shift its focus to Nur, a Turkish Muslim group, arresting at least 33 alleged Nur members and sentencing many of them to prison terms ranging from six to 12 years. The Government did not interfere with worshippers at sanctioned mosques and permitted the operation of other religious groups it considered mainstream. Some minority religious groups remained unregistered because they were unable to satisfy the strict registration requirements set out by the law. These groups, particularly those perceived as engaging in proselytism, experienced raids, harassment, and the detention of their leaders and members; some faced criminal charges. Religious groups enjoyed generally tolerant relations, although some minority religious groups continued to face negative media coverage and neighbors, family, and employers sometimes continued to pressure ethnic Uzbek Christians.

Venezuela

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion on the condition that the practice of a religion does not violate public morality, decency, or the public order. The Government generally respected the practice of religious freedom; however, religious groups, like others that criticized the Government, were subject to harassment and intimidation. During the reporting period leaders within the Catholic Church issued several statements critical of the country's democracy and human rights record. In response, President Chavez and other government officials on multiple occasions publicly criticized specific Catholic bishops and the Papal Nuncio. On April 6, 2009, the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV) issued a communiqué warning that the country's democratic system was "at risk of collapse." On April 13, 2009, unknown assailants robbed the Caracas headquarters of the CEV, stealing a laptop computer. Jewish leaders reported numerous incidents of anti-Semitism including graffiti, slurs, political cartoons, and media commentary. In January 2009 armed gunmen vandalized the Tiferet Israel synagogue, the oldest synagogue in Caracas, held the building for several hours, and spray-painted the walls with anti-Semitic slurs. In February 2009 criminal charges were filed against 11 persons, including several police officers, in connection with the vandalism. There were some efforts by the Government to limit the influence of religious groups in certain geographic, social, and political areas. Foreign missionaries, who require special visas, noted continued difficulties, especially for access to indigenous areas.

Vietnam

Respect for religious freedom and practice continued to improve in some regards during the reporting period, though significant problems remained. The Government took further steps to implement its 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and supplemental decrees on religious policy issued in 2005. During the reporting period, the Government granted national recognition to five Protestant denominations and four additional religions: the Bani Muslim Sect, the Threefold Enlightened Truth Path, the Threefold Southern Tradition, and the Baha'i Community. Also during the reporting period, the Government granted national registration certificates to one additional Protestant denomination as well as two additional religious groups. Some problems remained with implementation, primarily at the provincial and village level, including the slow pace--in some cases inaction--of registration of Protestant congregations in the north and the Northwest and Central Highlands; inconsistent application of procedures for the registration of congregations; and other cumbersome legal requirements and restrictions on religious recruitment. In some areas where registrations have been slow, Protestant congregations experienced harassment, such as in Tra Vinh province in the Mekong Delta and some isolated areas in the Northwest Highlands. There were unresolved property claims with virtually all religious groups including the Catholic Church, SECV, ECVN, and many smaller denominations, resulting, in particular, in large-scale Catholic protests that were forcibly repressed.

Yemen

The Constitution does not protect or inhibit freedom of religion. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is the source of all legislation. Muslims and followers of religious groups other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam and the proselytizing of Muslims. There was a decrease in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, particularly with regard to the Baha'i and Jewish communities. Following increased harassment, threats, and the killing of a Jewish community leader, many Jewish residents of Amran governorate began making plans to leave Yemen. The Government appeared unwilling or unable to increase security for the remaining Jewish population. For the first time, based on fears for the community's safety in Yemen, the U.S. Government initiated a special process to refer the Yemeni Jews for refugee resettlement in the United States. During the reporting period, the Government detained members of the Baha'i community because of their religious beliefs and they faced deportation, and there were reports of arrests of Christian converts. Some Zaydi Muslims reported that they continued to feel targeted by government entities for their religious affiliation.

PART II: U.S. ACTIONS IN COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

This section highlights actions by U.S. government officials to promote religious freedom and to encourage governments to take positive steps to improve religious freedom conditions in the Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs). The IRF Act requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide and the designation as CPCs of countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" during the reporting period. Following the designation, a period of negotiation may ensue, in which the United States seeks to work with a designated country to bring about change. Subsequently, depending upon the results of these discussions, the Secretary of State takes one or more actions, pursuant to the IRF Act.

Options for such actions include application of sanctions or negotiation of a bilateral agreement to improve religious freedom. Sanctions may be waived to further the purpose of the IRF Act or to further national interest. Some of these countries have also seen limited positive developments under circumstances where abuses of religious freedom are generally severe, and these are highlighted in Part III. Additional information can be found in the country reports. The Office of International Religious Freedom, headed by an Ambassador at Large, works throughout the year to promote religious freedom in each CPC.

In addition to its efforts in CPCs, the Department of State monitors religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, implements policies, develops initiatives, funds programs, and actively works bilaterally and multilaterally to foster greater respect for religious freedom. Through diplomacy, the United States seeks to promote freedom of religion and conscience throughout the world as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability for all countries.

Burma

Burma first was designated a CPC in 1999 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(1), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The U.S. Government has a wide array of financial and trade sanctions in place against Burma for its violations of human rights. The passage and signing into law in July 2008 of the Tom Lantos Block Burmese Junta Anti-Democratic Efforts Act further strengthened these sanctions. The U.S. Government advocated religious freedom with all strata of society, including government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, scholars, foreign

diplomats, and international business and media representatives. Through outreach and travel, when not blocked by regime officials, embassy representatives offered support to and exchanged information with many otherwise isolated local nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders. The U.S. Government funded a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees program to issue identification cards to undocumented Rohingya Muslims to facilitate their registration of births and marriages and access to basic education and health care.

China

China first was designated a CPC in 1999 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing restrictions on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under P.L. 101-246 and the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in China. U.S. officials condemned abuses while supporting positive trends within the country and urged the Government to expand the scope of religious freedom for both registered and unregistered religious groups according to citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of, asked to attend the trials of, and requested further information about numerous individual religious prisoners. U.S. officials encouraged the Government to address policies that restricted Tibetan Buddhist religious practices and contributed to tensions in the TAR and other Tibetan regions. Secretary of State Clinton raised religious freedom issues in meetings with Chinese leaders and attended services at a registered Protestant church in February 2009. In May 2009 Speaker of the House of Representatives Pelosi raised religious freedom concerns and attended mass at a registered Catholic church in Shanghai.

Eritrea

Eritrea first was designated a CPC in 2004 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups in prior reporting periods with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice. Despite repeated attempts, government authorities responsible for religious affairs did not grant U.S. embassy officials opportunities

to specifically discuss instances of religious freedom abuse during the reporting period.

Iran

Iran first was designated a CPC in 1999 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing restrictions on United States security assistance in accordance with section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran, and thus it does not raise directly with the Government the restrictions the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the Government commits against adherents of minority religious groups. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant UN and nongovernmental organization efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses. The United States calls on other countries with bilateral relations with Iran to use those ties to press the Government on religious freedom and human rights. On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities in the country. In UN resolutions, the U.S. Government has publicly condemned the treatment of the Baha'is, including a resolution that passed in the General Assembly in 2008. The U.S. Government encourages other governments to make similar statements.

North Korea

The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK) first was designated a CPC in 2001 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing restrictions to which North Korea is subject pursuant to sections 402 and 409 of the Trade Act of 1974 (the Jackson-Vanik Amendment), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The United States has no diplomatic relations with North Korea, and thus it does not raise directly with the Government the restrictions the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the Government commits against adherents of minority religious groups. The U.S. Government raised its concerns about the deplorable state of human rights in the country with bilateral partners and in multilateral forums. In December 2008 the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution with U.S. co-sponsorship that condemned the country's poor human rights record, expressing special concern at "continuing reports of systemic, widespread and grave violations" of human rights. The resolution called on North Korea to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party and further urged the Government to permit UN special representatives to visit and to ensure that humanitarian organizations have free access to the country. The

Department of State continued to support programs that document human rights abuses and increase the availability of outside information in the country, and provided support to NGOs that seek to build the capacity of South Korea-based NGOs in their efforts to improve and expand monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation in North Korea. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provided regular Korean-language broadcasting.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia first was designated a CPC in 2004 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. The Secretary authorized a waiver of actions under the IRF Act to further the purposes of the Act, pursuant to section 407 of the Act. U.S. government policy is to press the Government consistently to honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, promote tolerance toward non-Muslims, and combat extremism. During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador met with senior government and religious leaders regarding religious freedom and raised with senior officials specific cases of violations. Other senior U.S. officials encouraged the Government to honor policies to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology within the country and around the world, protect private worship for all religious groups, curb harassment of religious groups, and promote tolerance toward all religions. Senior U.S. officials supported provisions calling for religious tolerance, including elimination of discrimination against religious minorities, improved respect for human rights, and improved accountability and transparency in these matters. They also raised specific cases and instances of religious freedom violations with senior Saudi officials. An official from the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom visited Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dhahran to promote U.S. views on religious freedom.

Sudan

Sudan first was designated a CPC in 1999 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the use of the voice and vote of the United States to oppose any loan or other use of the funds of international financial institutions to or for Sudan consistent with 1621 of the International Financial Institutions Act, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The U.S. Government encouraged respect for religious freedom in its discussions with the Government of National Unity and urged it to fulfill the promise of religious freedom in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution. U.S. embassy officials met regularly with leaders

from many Muslim and Christian groups in Khartoum, Juba, and elsewhere, noting the importance of religious freedom and the extent of U.S. interest and concern.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan first was designated a CPC in 2006 and was re-designated on January 16, 2009. The Secretary authorized a 180-day waiver of actions under the IRF Act, effective January 16, 2009, to further the purposes of the Act, pursuant to section 407 of the Act. During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan and other embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and government officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. The Embassy emphasized the importance of religious freedom by hosting a variety of discussions and providing small grants to local groups focusing on religious freedom, and intervening with difficulties religious groups or faith-based foreign aid organizations faced. In November 2008, the Embassy hosted a roundtable with colleagues from other foreign missions and representatives from several evangelical Protestant denominations and the Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss issues affecting those communities. Officials in Washington, D.C., met on several occasions with Embassy of Uzbekistan officials to convey U.S. concerns regarding religious freedom. U.S. officials, both in Washington, D.C., and in Tashkent, encouraged the Government to release religious prisoners of conscience and revise its laws on religion, including lowering the 100-member minimum required to form a religious group, lifting restrictions on the importation and publication of religious literature, and eliminating legal provisions prohibiting the private teaching of religion, which the U.S. Government believes is an essential element for preventing further radicalization of young Muslims.

PART III: IMPROVEMENTS AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

This section highlights specific improvements in religious freedom conditions and positive developments during the reporting period that could lead to significant and lasting change. These developments took place across varied settings and do not reflect an overall assessment of religious freedom conditions in a country; some countries listed below already have excellent records on religious freedom, and others do not. Data from previous *Annual Reports* suggest that improvements in respect for religious freedom often develop incrementally over time, usually alongside complex and ongoing concerns. This section recognizes steps government and prominent societal actors took toward the achievement of significant improvements in religious freedom conditions, which must be identified under the IRF Act. Additional information helpful for placing these developments in context can be found in the country reports.

Australia

The Government has put in place extensive programs to promote respect for religious pluralism and in December 2008 established the Multicultural Advisory Council to provide advice on social "cohesion issues relating to Australia's cultural and religious diversity." The Government worked with Muslim leaders on the Advisory Council to develop de-radicalization programs for convicted terrorists. In December 2008, the Government launched the National Human Rights Consultation to seek the views of the public on how better to protect human rights. It was due to report to the Government by August 31, 2009. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission was preparing a report entitled *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century*. Prominent Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist leaders launched the Ambrose Centre for Religious Liberty in April 2009. One of the Centre's concerns is that the country's anti-vilification laws can be used against religious leaders who express views critical of other religions.

Bahrain

The Ministry of Education worked with the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs to develop a new religious education curriculum that covers the five principal schools of Islamic jurisprudence and practices and includes content opposing extremism. The Government has yet to give the curriculum its approval, after which it will go to Parliament for legislative approval. Also during the reporting period, the Government allowed members of some Christian churches to visit Christian prison inmates regularly to provide clothing and Christian literature.

Bangladesh

On December 29, 2008, the Awami League (AL), an avowedly secular party that enjoys broad support from religious minorities, won power in the first parliamentary elections since 2001. These elections were largely free of the violence and intimidation against religious minorities that had characterized earlier ones. The Government initiated efforts to reform the curriculum of Islamic religious schools, known as madrassahs, to standardize education. The Government also appointed members of the minority communities to senior leadership positions and took steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warned that they would take action against those attempting to disrupt the celebrations. There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice, but figures suggested that they declined significantly in comparison to the previous reporting period.

Brazil

In September 2008 the Rio de Janeiro State Legislature created a religious intolerance hotline number to register cases of discrimination or threats against any religion. In January 2009 representatives of various religious groups met in Rio de Janeiro to launch the NGO-published *Guide to Combat Racism and Religious Intolerance (Freedom Manual)*, written by a former state secretary of human rights. Police distributed the manual to police stations and religious organizations in Rio de Janeiro to advise officers on how to respond to discrimination complaints.

China

During the reporting period, government officials allowed increased space for some unregistered religious groups they viewed as non-threatening. The government took cautious measures to promote Buddhism, Taoism, and some folk religions within the framework of the Patriotic Religious Associations (PRAs). For example, in March the state-sanctioned Buddhist Association of China co-organized the Second World Buddhist Forum in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province. Most Christian groups, the majority of which were not affiliated with one of the PRAs, no longer operated in strict secrecy, and a branch of the State Council held an unprecedented meeting with a delegation of house church leaders. Reinforcing comments President Hu Jintao made in a 2007 speech to the 17th Chinese Communist Party National People's Congress, the Government stated in its new National Human Rights Action Plan that it would "encourage and support religious circles in launching social welfare programs [and] exploring methods and channels for religions to better serve society and promote the people's well-being." The Government did not indicate whether these statements would apply to unregistered religious groups outside the PRAs.

Germany

Chancellor Merkel accompanied U.S. President Barack Obama to the former concentration camp at Buchenwald during the President's June 5, 2009, visit, commemorating the victims of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime. The Government monitored right-wing extremists, conducted investigations into anti-Semitic crimes, and at times banned extremist groups deemed a threat to public order. Authorities sought to address right-wing extremism by conducting a variety of education programs to promote tolerance, many focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia. On November 4, 2008, the Bundestag passed a resolution addressing anti-Semitism in which it called upon the Government to create an experts group to coordinate government activities to combat anti-Semitism and provide routine

reports and an action plan to address the issue. The Government promoted tolerance by establishing dialogues with representatives of immigrant and Muslim groups on the integration of minorities and immigrants and on Islamic matters at the Chancellor and Interior Minister levels. On the local level, the Government hosted an exhibition on Muslim integration and the first Government Iftar. The Government released a progress report on its 2007 National Integration Plan, in which state and local authorities, representatives of minority groups, and the Government adopted measures and voluntary commitments relating to integration.

India

Government officials responded to a number of new and previous violent events, helping to prevent communal violence and providing relief and rehabilitation packages for victims and their families.

Indonesia

The Government prosecuted two key leaders of hardline Muslim organizations who were convicted and sentenced to 18 months in prison for their role in organized violence against a peaceful demonstration in support of religious freedom and pluralism. Although the two leaders were released after serving only nine months, the convictions are examples of the Government's growing willingness to pursue criminal actions in cases of violence against religious minorities. The Government also prosecuted terrorists responsible for religiously tinged violence in Sulawesi and the Malukus.

Kazakhstan

The Constitutional Council ruled in February 2009 that proposed amendments to the religion law were unconstitutional. In response to concerns about the restrictive nature of the legislation, the Government had received expert legal assistance from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and had incorporated some of its suggestions into the text of the legislation. On April 14, 2009, the President's Human Rights Commission (HRC), an advisory body within the Presidential Administration, presented the National Action Plan on Human Rights for 2009-12, the country's first such plan. One of the HRC's recommendations is that the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations, begin publishing annual reports on the status of religious freedom in the country. It also proposed that by 2011, the country should amend its religious legislation to bring it in line with international standards. The President signed the Action Plan in June 2009. In comparison to the previous reporting period, the Government's criticism

of "nontraditional religious groups" decreased. With the Atyrau group's registration, local Jehovah's Witnesses achieved registration in all 14 oblasts.

Lebanon

Citizens were able to remove their religious affiliation from their civil registry records following the February 11, 2009, issuance of a circular allowing citizens to remove their confessional identity from their civil registry records if they wish to do so.

Moldova

Following an April 2008 ruling of the Chisinau Appeals Court, all Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries received work permits. On February 2, 2009, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) added two new courses dedicated to religious freedom to training programs of the National Institute of Justice and instituted related seminars in the first semester of 2009. Following a July 1, 2008, roundtable discussion supported by the United Nations Development Program between the Government and religious groups, the Government published on the MOJ website a guide to the laws and regulations that govern registration of religious groups and their component parts.

The Netherlands

In 2008 the Government began a four-year, \$38 million (€26 million) outreach campaign to schools and neighborhoods to counter anti-Muslim sentiments, Islamic extremism, and right-wing nationalism. These efforts raised public awareness and triggered debate, but concerns about the policy's effectiveness remained. The Government regularly told prosecutors and the police to give proper attention to incidents of discrimination. In March 2009 Parliament adopted a law obliging all local governments to create antidiscrimination units. The Government followed up with a campaign to encourage victims to report incidents of discrimination. The Government also took measures to deal more effectively with discrimination and incitement to hatred on the Internet; however, critics charged that law enforcement agencies could do considerably more.

New Zealand

The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (HRC) continued to implement its Statement on Religious Diversity published in 2007, which aims to provide for equal treatment of all faiths before the state, the right to safety for religious individuals and communities, freedom of religious expression, the right to recognition and reasonable accommodation for religious groups, and the promotion of understanding in education. On March 26, 2009, the New Zealand police

released a new edition of "A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity" as a guide for its officers. The publication contains information on various faiths and religious practices in New Zealand and is designed to assist police in working within diverse religious communities. The guide also sets out basic human rights principles concerning religious diversity.

Oman

The Government lifted previous limitations on the number of religious workers in the country and shortened the process for granting permission to religious leaders to enter the country from two months to one week.

Pakistan

The Government took some limited steps to improve its treatment of religious minorities during the reporting period. The democratically elected Government appointed a Roman Catholic as Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs and upgraded his position to a cabinet minister. The Government allocated a 5 percent quota for religious minorities in all federal jobs and directed provincial governments to implement the same at the provincial level. The Government also decided to celebrate Minorities' Day on August 11 every year at the national level.

Qatar

The Government took steps during the reporting period to allow for increased religious expression, as the Indian Inter-Denominational Christian Church complex at Mesaimmer (offering Protestant and Catholic services) was inaugurated, and construction continued on four additional church facilities within the complex. In 2008 a Roman Catholic church opened for services, the first church built in Doha.

Saudi Arabia

While overall government policies continued to place severe restrictions on religious freedom, there were incremental improvements in specific areas during the reporting period, including better protection of the right to possess and use religious materials; increased scrutiny of and training for the members of the CPVPV; somewhat greater authority and capacity for official human rights entities to operate; limited education reform; and select measures to combat extremist ideology, including close scrutiny of Friday sermons by the Government; and sermons by leading clerics promoting tolerance and moderation.

Serbia

During the reporting period there were a number of positive developments. On November 26, 2008, Assistant Religion Minister Dragan Novakovic expressed to

the media his regret that most attacks on religious communities were prosecuted as minor offenses such as disturbing the peace instead of as incitement of hatred, which carries more severe penalties. In April 2009 Assistant Minister Novakovic visited a licensed Adventist high school in Novi Sad. On December 18, 2008, he met with Jehovah's Witnesses' representatives in Belgrade, the first such visit of a government official to the group's premises. Local authorities in Mladenovac issued a permit to the Christian Adventist Church to continue construction of its house of worship, a project that had been halted for more than two years due to previous decisions ordering destruction of the building. There continued to be progress on restitution of religious property seized in 1945 or later.

Spain

The City of Madrid held its first International Seminar on Anti-Semitism. City authorities of Lleida approved the construction of the first purpose-built mosque in Catalonia in modern times.

Tunisia

The Government facilitated and promoted the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer, and approximately 6,000 Jews, most with ties to the country, traveled from abroad to participate. According to the president of the Djerban Jewish community, attendance was the largest since al-Qa'ida attacked the synagogue in 2002, killing 21 persons. Local Jewish leaders stated that 20 to 25 percent of these pilgrims were Israeli citizens traveling under the relaxed travel policies that went into effect in 2004.

Turkmenistan

Despite continued problems, there were many small improvements during the reporting period. A policeman was fined a significant amount for beating a member of Jehovah's Witnesses in the only case of physical brutality reported. Two religious groups reported being able to share their faiths publicly without harassment for the first time. One unregistered group's leader reported that the group's adherents gathered in small groups in private apartments and were no longer raided by police or fined as occurred in the past. Government promotion of the *Ruhnama*, the former president's book on the spiritual and cultural life of the country, decreased. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief carried out a mission. The Government continued construction of large mosques in each of the provincial capitals, as well as smaller mosques in a number of villages and towns. All groups reported an easing of tensions.

Vietnam

Despite continued abuses, the Government took steps to assist in the training of new religious leadership--Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, and other religions--by facilitating the construction of new training facilities and furthering the education of thousands of monks, priests, nuns, and pastors. New congregations were registered in many of the country's 64 provinces, a number of new religious groups were both recognized and registered at the national level, and citizens were generally allowed to practice religion more freely. The Catholic Church, various Protestant congregations, and other smaller religious groups reported that their ability to gather and worship improved and that the Government eased restrictions on the assignment of new clergy. The Government also permitted Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants to hold several large-scale religious services throughout the country with more than 10,000 religious followers participating at each event. The Catholic Church reported that the Government approved the establishment of one additional Catholic seminary in Nam Dinh Province. Protestants and Catholics across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitudes toward their religion, and in general Protestants and Catholics were allowed to gather for worship without harassment, despite some isolated incidents.

Initiatives Toward Interfaith Tolerance and Understanding

In addition to the improvements and positive developments described above, many governments and key societal actors made new efforts during the reporting period to promote tolerance, dialogue, and an environment conducive to societal coexistence between religions. More information about most of these initiatives can be found in the country reports; there is no country report on the Vatican, however.

International Initiatives

International interfaith initiatives are growing in many parts of the world, and the Middle East region in particular has seen a growing interest in intra-faith and interfaith dialogue. There have been repeated calls for the promotion of tolerance, dialogue, and coexistence, resulting in joint efforts both within and beyond the region. The Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue has convened annually in Qatar since 2002. Jordanian King Abdullah's "Amman Message" of 2004 has promoted a number of interfaith conferences and activities and was an important precursor to further efforts. In Saudi Arabia, the Muslim World League held an intra-faith conference for Muslims, which was followed by the July 2008 Interfaith

Conference in Madrid and then by Saudi King Abdullah's Interfaith Dialogue Initiative in November 2008 at the United Nations.

The October 2007 release of a 21-page letter organized by Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad and signed by 138 Muslim leaders from around the world formed the basis for several ongoing initiatives. The letter was addressed to the Pope and other Christian leaders after the Pope's controversial Regensburg speech of September 2006 and in effect articulated for the first time a consensus among widely diverse (but not all) members of the Muslim community. The Vatican responded publicly in late November 2007, and in the spring of 2008 Muslims and Christians, primarily Roman Catholics, met to begin a dialogue based on the letter's recognition of their shared scriptures requiring love of God and one's neighbor. The first Catholic-Muslim Forum met formally in November 2008. In the meantime, Yale Divinity School organized a three-page reply signed by 300 Christian scholars and leaders representing scores of denominations and institutions. The Archbishop of Canterbury and others also issued separate personal responses.

The Vatican has also been involved in the Mecca-based World Muslim League initiative discussed above and in an ongoing dialogue with Shi'a, mostly Iranians. The Holy See has taken a leading role in recent engagement with Islam, accompanied by growing interest from diverse religious groups and regions.

Muslims engaged in dialogue with the Holy See seek greater respect for Islam, particularly in the West, and wish to emphasize that Islam is a religion of peace and disassociate it from violence. The Holy See favors a dialogue that will lead to greater religious freedom and tolerance for differences. In the letter exchange between Prince Ghazi and the Vatican, analysts have noted references from both sides to longstanding areas of concern, such as respect for the dignity of every human person and respect for religious freedom, often expressed in terms of "reciprocity." Other areas of concern include educating the public on the essential elements of both religions, sharing religious experience, and promoting mutual respect instead of violence, especially among the young.

Within-Country Initiatives

Argentina: The Government continued to sponsor numerous interfaith dialogues, including high-profile events such as Religious Freedom Day.

Hungary: In light of increased reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, especially anti-Semitic rhetoric, Christian churches and the Jewish community continued to organize regular events under the auspices of the Christian-Jewish Society, which brings together religious academicians for discussions. The Budapest conference of the Catholic-Jewish Relations International Committee issued a statement declaring that Catholic and Jewish dialogue that results in growing friendship and understanding is a "sign of hope and inspiration for our troubled world."

India: Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. Prominent leaders of all religious groups made public efforts to show respect for other religious groups by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Muslim groups protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in places such as Gujarat. In the aftermath of the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist strikes, religious leaders of all communities condemned the attacks and issued statements to maintain communal harmony.

Norway: The Council for Religious and Philosophical Communities, including the state church and other religious communities, organized events including a "dialogue conference" and a debate about religion in educational institutions. The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated closer coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom issues and conducted research projects on New Directions in Islamic Thought and Practice, Facilitating Freedom of Religion, Missionary Activities and Human Rights, and Teaching for Tolerance and Religious Freedom.

Oman: The Government sponsored regular interfaith dialogues and fora for examining differing interpretations of Islam, Christianity, and philosophical approaches that are not tied to a specific religion.

Samoa: Religious freedom issues were discussed and debated at the Pacific Futures Law and Religion Symposium, which brought together the Head of State, Chief Justice, Deputy Prime Minister, religious leaders, and academics.

South Korea: Prominent religious leaders regularly met privately and under government auspices to promote understanding and tolerance.

Switzerland: Religious communities in approximately 40 cities across the country joined together to celebrate a "Week of Religions" under the motto "Getting to Know Each Other." For a week, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is invited each other to attend their religious services and held a series of special events such as music concerts, panel discussions, round table meetings, and open discussion forums.

Syria: The Government and civil society hosted numerous interfaith dialogue events and conferences, including "The Message of Peace in Islam," "Islam and the West," "Religion and Respect: Learning from Each Other's Faith," and a workshop on the role of women in promoting interfaith dialogue. The "Sham Spiritual Oasis" architecture exhibition, sponsored by Wadi Deir Mar Musa and the European Union, featured proposals by international architects for an eco-cultural way station that would provide a multi-functional space for people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to join one another for meditation and educational cooperation. The Government announced that the winning design would be built at Deir Mar Musa on 14 hectares of land the Government donated.

Thailand: In accordance with a clause retained in the 2007 Constitution requiring the Government to "promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions," the Government actively sponsored interfaith dialogue through regular meetings and numerous public education programs, including youth reconciliation camps, popular media, and initiatives for poverty relief and crime prevention.

Ukraine: The Government continued to promote interfaith understanding by frequently consulting with the All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, which represents more than 90 percent of the religiously active population. In April 2009 the Ministry of Defense and major religious groups formed the Council for Pastoral Support.

We are encouraged by this growing recognition by governments and religious leaders that extremism is a common enemy and that freedom and respectful religious coexistence are critical to our shared future. We look forward to broadening these conversations to include the full diversity of faith traditions and to build a world in which all are free to choose and practice their faith and live according to their conscience.

AFGHANISTAN

The constitution states that Islam is the "religion of the state" and that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." In 2004, the constitution accorded both Shi'a and Sunni Islam equal recognition. The constitution proclaims that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law."

The government took limited steps to increase religious freedom, but serious problems remain. Still recovering from more than 30 years of violence and suffering from an ongoing insurgency, the country continued to move toward greater stability and democracy. Residual effects of years of jihad against the USSR, civil strife, Taliban rule, popular suspicion regarding outside influence and the motivations of foreigners, and still weak democratic institutions remain obstacles. Intolerance was manifested in harassment and occasional violence against religious minorities and Muslims who were perceived as not respecting Islamic strictures.

In April 2009 President Karzai signed a law codifying the implementation of Islamic family law for the Shi'a minority. This law implemented the provision of the constitution recognizing the right of the Shi'a minority to adjudicate personal and family matters according to their own school of jurisprudence. The law attracted widespread criticism because of restrictions on the rights of women. International partners of Afghanistan and Afghan civil society groups objected strongly to the law. The president agreed to suspend enactment of the law until the Ministry of Justice had reviewed and amended it. The review process was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The country's population is almost entirely Muslim. Non-Muslim minority groups continued to face incidents of discrimination and persecution. Conversion from Islam is understood by both Sunni and Shi'a Islamic clergy and many citizens to contravene the tenets of Islam and Shari'a. Within the Muslim population, relations among the different sects continued to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a community faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. This discrimination continued. Local Sikh and Hindu populations, although allowed to practice their religion publicly, continued to encounter problems obtaining land for cremation and historically have faced discrimination when seeking government jobs as well as harassment during major celebrations. Most local Christians did not publicly state their beliefs or gather openly to

worship.

The U.S. government regularly discusses religious freedom with government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy continued to send political, civil society, and religious leaders to programs in the United States. Some Provincial Reconstruction Teams provided assistance through the U.S. military's Commanders Emergency Response Program funds to assist in repairing madrassahs (Islamic religious schools) for local communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 402,356 square miles and a population of approximately 31 million. Reliable data on religious demography is not available because an official nationwide census has not been conducted in decades.

Observers estimate that 80 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 19 percent Shi'a Muslim, and other religious groups less than one percent of the population. According to self-estimates by these communities, there are approximately 4,900 Sikh and 1,100 Hindu believers, and more than 400 Baha'is. There is a small, hidden Christian community; estimates on its size range from 500 to 8,000. In addition, there are small numbers of adherents of other religious groups, mostly Buddhist foreigners. There is one known Afghan Jew.

Traditionally, the dominant religion has been Islam, and the sect of Sunni Islam that follows the Hanafi school of religious thought. For the last 200 years, much of the population adhered to Deobandi-influenced Hanafi Sunnism. The Dar-ul-Ulum (Institute of Higher Religious Education) at Deoband is a prominent Asian center of Sunni religious education. Many Afghan Sunni religious scholars have either studied at Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband themselves, or were trained by scholars who had studied there. A sizable minority of Afghans also adhered to orders of Islamic spirituality and mysticism, generally known as Sufism. Sufism centers on orders or brotherhoods (both Sunni and Shi'a) that follow charismatic religious leaders. During the 20th century, influence of the "Wahhabi" form of Islam grew in certain regions.

Members of the same religious groups have traditionally concentrated in certain regions. Some groups were displaced forcibly by kings for internal security reasons or to make agricultural and grazing land available to favored ethnic groups. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns dominate the south and east. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat, the mountainous central highland provinces around Bamyan Province. Northeastern provinces traditionally have Ismaili populations.

Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, are more heterogeneous and include Sunni, Shi'a, Hindu, Sikh, and Baha'i populations. The northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif includes a mix of Sunnis (including ethnic Pashtuns, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) and Shi'a (Hazaras and Qizilbash) including Shi'a Ismailis.

In the past, small communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, Jews, and Christians lived in the country, although most members of these communities emigrated during the years of civil war and Taliban rule. Non-Muslim minorities were estimated to number in the hundreds at the end of Taliban rule. A small population of native Hindus and Sikhs never departed. Since the fall of the Taliban, some members of religious minorities have returned, with many settling in Kabul.

Nuristanis, a small but distinct ethnolinguistic group living in a mountainous eastern region, practiced an ancient polytheistic religion until they converted to Islam in the late 19th century. Some non-Muslim religious practices survive today as folk customs, though the Nuristanis are Muslims.

There are two active gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) in Kabul, and six Hindu mandirs (temples) in four cities. Two mandirs are located in Kabul. Eighteen others were destroyed or rendered unusable due to looting during wartime.

There is one Christian church and one synagogue. Some citizens who converted to Christianity as refugees have returned. Others may have been born abroad into other religious groups. The Baha'i faith has had followers in the country for approximately 150 years. The community is predominantly based in Kabul, where more than 300 Baha'i members live; another 100 are said to live in other parts of the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Full and effective enforcement of the new constitution is an ongoing challenge due to potentially contradictory commitments it contains, and the lack of a tradition of judicial review.

The constitution was ratified in January 2004. It includes a mandate to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and obliges the state to "create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, and to ensure

national unity and equality among all ethnic groups and tribes." Followers of other religions are "free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of the law."

The constitution requires that the president and vice president be Muslim and does not distinguish in this respect between Sunni and Shi'a. This requirement is not explicitly applied to government ministers or members of parliament, but each of their oaths includes swearing allegiance and obedience to the principles Islam.

The constitution also declares that Islam is the official "religion of the state," that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam," and that "the provisions of adherence to the fundamentals of the sacred religion of Islam and the regime of the Islamic Republic cannot be amended." For issues on which the constitution and penal code are silent (including conversion and blasphemy), courts rely on Shari'a law--some interpretations of which conflict with the mandate to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

While the constitution does not make specific reference to Shari'a, it does state that when there is no provision in the constitution or other laws that guide ruling on an issue, the courts' decisions shall accord with Hanafi jurisprudence in the way that will serve justice in the best possible manner. The constitution also grants that Shi'a law will be applied in cases dealing with personal matters where all parties are Shi'as. There is no separate law applying to non-Muslims.

During the reporting period, the president signed a Shi'a Family Law that contained provisions many national and international observers believe violated the constitution's guarantee of equal rights to men and women. Under national and international pressure, the president agreed to halt enactment of the law until the Ministry of Justice had reviewed and amended the law. The review process was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In protest against the original version of the law, some women demonstrated publicly in Kabul by marching and chanting slogans. Supporters of the law (also including women) held a larger counter-demonstration. Afghan authorities permitted and protected both demonstrations. No serious injuries were reported.

Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy and is punishable by death under some interpretations of Shari'a. A citizen who converted from Islam (if a male over age 18 or a female over age 16, who is of sound mind) would have three days to recant his or her conversion or be subject to death by hanging. Individuals could also be stripped of all their property and possessions and have their marriage

declared invalid. The Afghan Criminal Code does not define apostasy as a crime, and the constitution forbids punishment for any crime not defined in the criminal code. In recent years, neither the national nor local authorities have imposed criminal penalties on converts from Islam.

Blasphemy is a capital crime under some interpretations of Shari'a, and according to such interpretations, an Islamic judge could punish blasphemy with death, if committed by a male over age 18 or a female over age 16, who is of sound mind. Those accused of blasphemy are given three days to recant their actions or face death by hanging. In recent years, this sentence has not been carried out.

The General Directorate of Fatwas and Accounts under the Supreme Court has ruled that the Baha'i faith is distinct from Islam and a form of blasphemy. It holds that all Muslims who convert to the Baha'i faith are apostates and all followers of the Baha'i faith are infidels. The ruling created uncertainties for the country's small Baha'i population, particularly on the question of marriages between Baha'i women and Muslim men. Citizens who convert from Islam to the Baha'i faith face risk of persecution, similar to that of Christian converts, up to and including the death penalty. Also unclear is how the government will treat second-generation Baha'is who technically have not converted, as they were born into families of Baha'i followers, but may still be viewed as having committed blasphemy. The ruling was not expected to affect foreign national Baha'is.

According to Afghan laws on marriage, non-Muslims do not have the right to marry whether born in the country or elsewhere. According to government officials, the court nevertheless considers all citizens to be Muslims by default, and therefore non-Muslims can be married as long as they do not publicly acknowledge their non-Muslim beliefs. In addition, the judges stated that a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman, but if she is not "of the book," i.e., is not Christian or Jewish, she must first convert. Moreover, a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man.

Only Islamic holy days are celebrated as public holidays. The Shi'a community openly celebrated the birthday of Imam Ali, one of the most revered figures in the Shi'a tradition. Observations of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in January 2008 and January 2009 were widespread and peaceful. In previous years, Ashura celebrations triggered violence in the cities of Kabul and Herat.

The government continued to update the existing criminal and civil legal codes to bring them in line with the country's international treaty obligations. Chapter 18 of

the Penal Code of 1976 addresses "Crimes Against Religions," although it does not address blasphemous remarks. Article 347 of the Penal Code says persons who forcibly stop the conduct of religious rituals and persons who destroy or damage permitted places of worship where religious rituals are conducted or who destroy or damage any sign or symbol of any religion shall be subject to a medium-term prison sentence (defined in Article 101 of the Afghan Criminal Code as confinement in a jail for not less than one, nor more than five years) and/or a cash fine of between \$240 and \$1,200 (12,000 and 60,000 Afghanis). There is nothing in the penal code related to the spoken or written utterance of insults or profanity against God, religion, sacred symbols, or religious books.

There are no laws that forbid proselytizing, although many authorities and most of society view the practice as contrary to the beliefs of Islam. There were unconfirmed reports of harassment of Christians thought to be involved in proselytizing. They reveal their faith to those they trust, but are careful not to be viewed as seeking to spread their faith to the larger community.

The constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press. The Afghan Mass Media Law, which included negative articles with respect to the freedoms of religion and expression, was vetoed by President Karzai and returned to parliament's Lower House in December 2007 for further consideration.

On September 6, 2008, two-thirds of parliament voted to override the president's veto. However, as of the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice has not published the law in its official gazette. At the end of the reporting period, the media bill was still in the president's office.

Under Article 45 of the law sent to the parliament, the following are prohibited: works and materials that are contrary to the principles of Islam; works and materials offensive to other religions and sects; works and materials humiliating or offensive to real or legal persons; works and materials considered libelous to real and legal persons and that may cause damage to their personality and credibility; works and materials affecting the stability, national security, and territorial integrity of the country; false literary works, materials, and reports disrupting the public's mind; propagation of religions other than Islam; disclosure of identity and pictures of victims of violence and rape in a manner that damages their social prestige, and articles and topics that harm the physical, spiritual, and moral well-being of people, especially children and adolescents.

Also under the media law, the proprietors of newspapers, printers, and electronic

media companies must be licensed by and registered with the Ministry of Information and Culture. This formalizes in Afghanistan's written law a prohibition on the use of mass media to attempt to convert persons to religions other than Islam. Any attempt to convert a Muslim to another religion is already illegal under the constitution (which enshrines Shari'a law as the basis no law shall contravene), whether through the mass media or otherwise.

The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes offensive material offers the potential for abuse to restrict press freedom and intimidate journalists. These rules also apply to non-Muslims and foreign-owned media outlets. The amended media law instructs National Radio and Television Afghanistan, the state-run media outlet, to provide balanced broadcasting that respects the culture, language, and religious beliefs of all ethnic groups in the country. The law also provides for a media violations commission responsible for receiving and investigating allegations of media law violations.

The Ulema Council, headed by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari, is a group of influential Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi scholars, imams, and Muslim jurists from across the country reflecting the network of provincial ulema councils. Its senior members meet regularly with the president and advise him on Islamic moral, ethical, and legal issues. The council is nominally independent of the government, but its members receive financial support from the state. Through contacts with the presidential palace, the parliament, and ministries, the council or its members advise on the formulation of new legislation or the implementation of existing law. Although it is well represented in provincial capitals, the council has much less outreach in villages and rural areas.

In November 2007 the Ulema Council issued a declaration calling for moderation in freedom of expression and press freedom by urging individuals to avoid conduct that may be perceived as insulting to local traditions and religious values. The statement declared that "safeguarding our national honors and Islamic values is the obligation of every citizen." This declaration mirrors Article 1 of the constitution, enforced in high-profile cases such as the case of Parvez Kambakhsh, imprisoned for 20-years for distributing material from the internet questioning the condition of women in Islam.

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) monitors high-profile religious freedom cases and receives and investigates complaints from the public. During the reporting period, all provincial police departments had human rights officers to investigate abuses, although many, like most other institutions,

lacked adequate personnel and other resources.

The Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs is the primary ministry handling religious affairs. The ministry's responsibilities include sending citizens on the Hajj pilgrimage, collecting endowment-related revenues, identifying and acquiring endowment-related property, providing religious teaching to children, issuing fatwas and testing imams, and raising public awareness of religious issues.

Both Sunnis and Shi'as were permitted to go on the Hajj, and the government imposed no quota for either group. The government sponsored approximately 2,000 Shi'as and 18,000 Sunnis to make the Hajj in 2008. Participants were selected by lottery. Another 10,000 people made the Hajj supported by private donations.

The licensing and registration of religious groups is not required, though the government registers mullahs. Mullahs working for the Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs are generally proposed for registration by local residents and approved by the ministry. There are an estimated 160,000 mullahs working in the country. Of those, 3,250 are registered with and receive salaries from the ministry. There are an estimated 1,180 mullahs working in Kabul, of whom 628 receive salaries from the ministry (and are counted as part of the 3,250 national figure). Many mullahs are not registered due to lack of capacity and funding to support more mullahs at mosques, as well as security problems in the provinces. New mosques are either opened or built based on the government's development plans or based on proposals by local residents, then approved by the Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs.

The Ministry of Education considers it the government's responsibility to offer tolerant and modern Islamic education for youth. In April 2007 the government began setting up its own madrassahs to reduce the number of Afghan children studying at extremist madrassahs abroad, and to counter the influence of extremist elements operating in the countryside, including those through independent madrassahs. These schools plan to offer an alternative to the Taliban's use of education as a weapon of terrorism, but lack of funding has hindered these plans. Fourteen "high madrassahs" (called "Dar-ul-Ulum") were established in 2007 and eight in 2008, with a new high madrassah to eventually open in each of the country's 34 provinces. Lack of funding has slowed progress in opening more schools. The planned schools will accommodate up to 50,000 children and offer a curriculum consisting of 40 percent religious education, 40 percent general education, and 20 percent computer science and foreign languages.

The Ministry of Education requires that independent madrassahs be accredited and disclose their funding sources. Madrassahs that receive private or international donations not routed through the ministry are banned. According to the Ministry of Education, the government recently began soliciting donations for the support of madrassahs of all levels from Muslim countries and private individuals, including a request that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia support an Afghan madrassah. The ministry representative cited Sheikh Zayed University in Khost Province as an example of the success of this policy. The university is completely funded by the United Arab Emirates. This system allows the government to control the provision of assistance to institutes of learning funded by known allies of Afghanistan.

The components of the educational system that survived more than 30 years of war place considerable emphasis on religion. The constitution states, "The state shall devise and implement a unified educational curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture, and in accordance with academic principles, and develops the curriculum of religious subjects on the basis of the Islamic sects existing in Afghanistan." The public school curriculum included Islamic content, but no content from other religious groups.

There was no restriction on parental religious teaching, and non-Muslims were not required to study Islam. The national curriculum and textbooks that emphasize moderate Islamic terms and principles steadily replaced the preaching of jihad in schools. The Ministry of Education began introducing human rights as a subject in the national school curriculum at the beginning of the school year in 2003 and extended it nationwide in 2004. New textbooks for grades one through six were distributed throughout the country. The Ministry of Education continues to work on a curriculum and texts for grades seven through twelve.

Since the fall of the Taliban, the government has not banned any political parties for religious reasons. The constitution allows for political parties provided that "the program and charter of the party are not contrary to the principles of the sacred religion of Islam." Afghan law does not permit political parties based on ethnicity, language, Islamic school of thought, or religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally did not enforce existing legal restrictions on religious freedom vigorously or in a discriminatory fashion. There was no information available concerning restrictions on the general training of clergy. The

government paid officially registered mullahs, but only a small number of active mullahs were registered, because the government's registration program operates on a limited budget and with a limited staff.

There were an unknown number of foreign missionaries in the country who worked discreetly to avoid harassment. There are no non-Islamic religiously oriented organizations in the country whose avowed purpose is proselytization. During the reporting period, there were a few reported incidents involving individuals attempting to proselytize, though no prosecutions arose from those incidents.

Despite reports of local government officials prohibiting music, movies, and television broadcasts on religious grounds, the cable television audience in urban centers continued to expand; and televisions, radios, and other electronic goods were sold freely. Music was played widely. Government officials publicly criticized private media outlets for broadcasting material that was "un-Islamic," such as footage of women dancing in music videos or live musical performances.

Nongovernmental radio stations broadcast a mix of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, and Western music. Approximately 90 percent of the country's inhabitants reported some access to radio. Broadcasts had no religious content other than brief prayers and Qur'an readings on the government-controlled radio station.

Many in the Sikh and Hindu communities chose to send their children to Sikh and Hindu schools (or no school at all) because of reported abuse and harassment by other students in government-run schools. There are no Christian or Jewish schools.

As in previous years, Hindus complained of not being able to cremate the remains of their dead in accordance with their customs due to interference by those who lived near the cremation sites. The government continued to intervene to protect the Hindus' (and Sikhs') right to carry out cremations. Although community representatives expressed concerns over land disputes, they often chose not to pursue restitution through the courts for fear of retaliation, particularly when powerful local leaders occupied their property. There were no known reports of discrimination against Hindus by the government.

The government provides free electricity to mosques. The Sikh and Hindu communities lobbied the government to provide free electricity to their gurdwaras and temples; however, the government had not addressed these concerns as of the

end of the reporting period.

There are no legal restrictions on the import of religious texts, but there was at least one instance during the reporting period of the government destroying books on Shi'ism. The Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs announced on May 27, 2009, that it had seized and destroyed 1,000 books on Shi'ism in late 2008 in Nimruz Province after the books came into Afghanistan. The books had been printed in Iran, and ordered by booksellers in Kabul. The ministry announced that the books had been thrown into a river as "dangerous to the unity of Afghanistan" because they contained interpretations of religion that were offensive to Sunni Muslims.

The government does not designate religion on national identity cards and does not require individuals to declare belief in Islam to receive citizenship. However, the state, including the courts, traditionally considers all citizens to be Muslim; therefore, some basic citizenship rights of non-Muslims were not explicitly codified.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Officials took actions that violated the religious freedom of some individuals or groups.

In September 2008 a Kabul primary court sentenced Ghaus Zalmai and Mullah Qari Mushtq to 20 years' imprisonment for publishing a Dari-language translation of the Qur'an without the accompanying Arabic verses for comparison. Religious scholars had alleged the translation was also un-Islamic for misinterpreting verses about alcohol, begging, homosexuality, and adultery. Protests calling for Zalmai's and Mushtq's punishment were held in various towns, including a November 2007 demonstration in Jalalabad of reportedly more than 1,000 university students who demanded the death penalty for the two men. On February 15, 2009, a Kabul appeals court affirmed the 20-year prison sentences. Lawyers for Zalmai and Mushtq immediately filed an appeal to the Afghan Supreme Court, though the case had not been heard by the end of the reporting period.

In October 2007 police arrested Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh, a student at Balkh University and a journalist for *Jahan-e Naw* (New World) daily, after he allegedly downloaded and distributed information from the Internet regarding the role of women in Islamic societies. In January 2008 a local court sentenced him to death

for "insolence to the Holy Prophet," basing its decision on Shari'a law. Kambakhsh immediately appealed the decision, and the Attorney General's office moved the case to the Kabul Appeals Court. After several days of hearings, in October 2008 a Kabul appeals court in a closed proceeding commuted the death sentence to a 20-year prison sentence without notifying Kambakhsh's defense attorney. International and national actors have urged the president to use his constitutional authority to pardon Kambakhsh, but at the end of the reporting period Kambakhsh remained in prison.

In May 2007 the General Directorate of Fatwas and Accounts under the Supreme Court issued a ruling on the status of the Baha'i faith, declaring it distinct from Islam and a form of blasphemy. There have been no cases cited under this ruling since its issuance.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

There were reported abuses targeted at specific religious groups by terrorist organizations, including al-Qa'ida and Taliban networks, during the period covered by this report. As in previous years, killings of religious leaders and attacks on mosques were attributed to al-Qa'ida and Taliban members. Sources report that anti-government elements continued to target religious leaders based on their links to the government or their particular interpretations of Islam.

According to the AIHRC, in 2008 insurgents assassinated at least ten religious leaders due to their links to the government. In November 2008 the Taliban killed a religious leader in Farah Province days after he led prayers condemning suicide attacks.

There were also attacks on both Muslim and non-Muslim employees of international organizations, but it is unclear whether these attacks were politically or religiously motivated.

Political motivations appeared to be the primary impetus behind insurgent attacks on schools. In December 2008, the Afghan Independent Human Rights

Commission reported that in the last seven months of 2008, the Taliban assassinated 226 teachers and students; the Ministry of Education reported the number at 149. In June 2009 insurgents burned a school in the Khash Road District of Nimroz Province. In a May 2009 interview, Helmand's Deputy Minister of Education Mamoud Mohammed Wali said that in Helmand Province alone, insurgents had forced 75 of 228 public schools to close, and burned eight public schools to the ground. This included the burning of a girls' school in Nad Ali District in February 2009 and the closure of another public school after the assassination of a teacher in the same district.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The government continued to stress reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens. Although it was concerned primarily with reconciliation of former Taliban combatants, it also expressed concern about religious intolerance. The government responded positively to international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom. The government continued to emphasize ethnic and intrafaith reconciliation indirectly through support to the judicial, constitutional, and human rights commissions composed of members of different ethnic and Islamic religious (Sunni and Shi'a) groups. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs worked together to give women the opportunity to attend mosques.

After participating in civil society or human rights training, some mullahs began incorporating these messages into their teachings.

Immigrants and noncitizens were free to practice their own religions. In Kabul, 200 to 300 expatriates met regularly at Christian worship services in private locations. There is only one Christian church in the country. It is located within the diplomatic enclave, and not open to local nationals. Buddhist foreigners were free to practice in temples established for the Buddhist immigrant community.

The government provided limited funding or assistance for Sikh schools. In July 2007, the Ministry of Education opened a school for Sikh and Hindu children in Ghazni Province. A Sikh school in Kabul has been run privately and without assistance from the government for several years.

Members of the Hindu and Sikh communities reported that they no longer apply for government jobs because of past discrimination. President Karzai appointed one Sikh member to the upper house of parliament. The Hindu and Sikh

communities have lobbied to have one seat each designated for a Hindu and a Sikh representative in parliament. They point out that ten seats are reserved for the ethnic minority Kuchi community and that their communities should also have reserved representation.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Relations between the different branches of Islam continued to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the Sunni population. Since Shi'a representation has increased in government, overt discrimination by Sunnis against the Shi'a community decreased. Sunni resentment over growing Shi'a influence was expressed widely often linked to claims of Iranian efforts to influence local culture and politics.

Most Shi'a were members of the Hazara ethnic group, which was traditionally segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious reasons, some of which resulted in conflicts. The Hazaras accused the government, led by Pashtuns, of providing preferential treatment to Pashtuns and of ignoring minorities, especially Hazaras. The government made significant efforts to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community, including affirmative hiring practices. Although there were reported incidents of unofficial discrimination, and treatment varied by locality, Shi'a generally were free to participate fully in public life.

According to a recent United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report, Ismailis were not generally targeted or seriously discriminated against, but they continued to be exposed to risks in some local areas.

Non-Muslim minorities such as Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians continued to face social discrimination and harassment and, in some cases, violence. This treatment was not systematic, but the government was not able to improve conditions during the reporting period. The Hindu population, which is less distinguishable than the Sikh population (whose men wear a particular headdress), faced less harassment, although Hindus reported being harassed by neighbors in their communities. The Sikh and Hindu communities, although allowed to practice their faith publicly, reportedly continued to face discrimination, including intimidation, causing some to leave the country. Although Hindus and Sikhs had recourse to dispute resolution mechanisms such as the Special Land and Property Court, in practice the communities felt unprotected.

Some Sikh and Hindu children were unable to attend government schools due to harassment from other students. The government took limited steps to protect these children and reintegrate them into the classroom environment. The AIHRC reported that members of the Hindu community in Kandahar City faced discrimination in schools and asked the local government to build a separate school for Sikh and Hindu children. The government did not do so during the reporting period.

Local religious officials continued to confront women over their attire and behavior. In rural areas, many women when they are in public wear a burqa that covers their full body and face, including the eyes. Since the fall of the Taliban, many women in urban areas no longer wear the burqa, but almost all wear some form of head covering either by personal choice or due to community pressure.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

U.S. representatives met regularly with government officials and with religious and minority figures in an ongoing dialogue regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction. The U.S. government worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance.

The U.S. embassy actively promoted professional and cultural ties between local citizens and the United States. The public affairs section coordinated a variety of exchange, speaker, artistic, and information programs to generate an exchange of ideas between Americans and local citizens on democracy and civil society, human rights, Islam in America, and other subjects. The United States funded travel by local journalists, academics, politicians, government officials, religious scholars, community leaders, women, youth, and non-governmental organization (NGO) officials to engage with their counterparts in the United States.

Though there were no visits by mullahs to the United States on International Visitor Leadership Programs between 2005 and 2008, the U.S. embassy accepted nominees for two Fiscal Year 2009 visitors programs that will focus on religious leaders and encourage religious freedom.

Some Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) provided assistance through U.S. military Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds to assist in

repairing madrassahs for local communities. During the reporting period, the U.S. military planned projects to assist in repairing, refurbishing, or providing supplies and equipment to nine madrassahs and 83 mosques.

The U.S. government worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance. During the reporting period, the U.S. government provided funding for radio programming and training of religious, elected, and community leaders on the theme of "Human Rights and Women's Rights in the Context of Islam," developed and implemented by the NGO Equal Access. To date, more than 400 religious and community leaders have been trained. The U.S. government also provided funding for eight roundtable discussions with ulemas and mullahs focused on their perceptions of civil society and their own role in its development. Sixty-four religious leaders, including 11 women, participated.

ALBANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 11,100 square miles and a population of 3.6 million. No reliable data were available on religious participation or membership; the last official census including such data was held in 1939. The majority of citizens do not actively practice a faith; however, the four traditional religious groups are Muslim (Sunni), Bektashi (a form of Shi'a Sufism), Orthodox Christian (the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania), and Roman Catholic. In addition, there are substantial numbers of Protestant denominations and other religious groups, including Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The State Committee on Cults reported a total of 245 religious groups, organizations, and foundations in addition to the four traditional religious groups. This number included 34 Islamic organizations and 189 Protestant organizations, mostly associated with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular. According to the Constitution, there is no official religion and all religions are equal; however, the predominant religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Catholic) enjoy a greater degree of official recognition (e.g., national holidays) and social status based on their historical presence in the country. Official holidays include holy days of all four predominant faiths.

The Government does not require registration or licensing of religious groups; however, the State Committee on Cults maintains records and statistics on foreign religious organizations that contact it for assistance. Religious movements may acquire the official status of a juridical person by registering with the Tirana District Court under the Law on Nonprofit Organizations, which recognizes the status of a nonprofit association regardless of whether the organization has a cultural, recreational, religious, or humanitarian character. Registration grants religious groups the right to hold bank accounts and own property. Tax-exempt status was granted during the reporting period to the four traditional religious communities; however, because of new agreements reached with the Government on October 24, 2008, they are required to reregister as a religious community in order to qualify. Other religious groups without bilateral agreements with the Government continued to petition for tax-exempt status.

The State Committee on Cults, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth, and Sports, is charged with regulating relations between the Government and religious communities as well as protecting freedom of religion and promoting interreligious cooperation and understanding. The committee claims that its records on religious organizations facilitate the granting of residence permits by police to foreign employees of various religious organizations. No organization reported any difficulty obtaining residency permits during the reporting period. However, as a general rule, foreign missionaries were issued one-year residency permits instead of the five-year permits allowed by law for residents in the country for more than two years. The committee continued working with the Government on criteria that would allow residency permits of up to five years for well-established religious organizations with long-term ties to the country.

Article 10 of the Constitution calls for separate bilateral agreements to regulate relations between the government and religious communities. On October 24, 2008, the Government signed agreements with the Muslim, Orthodox, and Bektashi communities. The Catholic Church has had such an agreement with the

Government since 2002. VUSH, a Protestant umbrella organization, has asked to conclude a bilateral agreement. Among the advantages of having the agreement are an official recognition of the community, prioritized property restitution, and tax exemptions. Government financial support and state-subsidized clergy salaries are to be implemented based on a law on the financing of religious communities passed on June 5, 2009.

According to the Ministry of Education, public schools are secular and the law prohibits ideological and religious indoctrination. Religion is not taught in public schools. According to official figures, religious communities, organizations, and foundations had 103 affiliated associations and foundations, with 101 of those managing 101 educational institutions, of which 15 were officially religious-affiliated schools. By law the Ministry of Education must license these schools, and curriculums must comply with national education standards. The Catholic and Muslim groups operated numerous state-licensed schools and reported no problems obtaining licenses for new schools. The Orthodox Church and the Bektashis operated strictly religious educational centers for the training of clerics.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There is no law prohibiting the wearing of religious clothing or symbols. School principals have the right to set standards for "appropriate clothing," which at times included restrictions on public displays of religious symbols. During the reporting period, three female public high school students were prevented from attending classes for wearing headscarves.

The Government continued to address claims from each of the four traditional religious groups regarding the return or restitution of property seized during the former communist era; however, many of the property claims remained unresolved. With the newly signed bilateral agreements, the State Agency for the Restitution and Compensation of Property was instructed to give priority to properties owned by religious communities.

The Orthodox Church continued construction of a new cathedral in Tirana on land that it received as compensation for land seized by the communist government, but it cited lack of action on other property claims throughout the country.

Both the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church included in their restitution claims religious icons and precious manuscripts seized by the communist government that remained in the national archives.

The Albanian Islamic Community continued to request building permits for a new mosque on land that was returned to the community through the post-communist restitution process. The request remained under consideration by the Municipality of Tirana.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, nor were any substantial acts of vandalism reported.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy supported the efforts of the State Committee on Cults to develop and complete bilateral agreements between the state and some religious communities. Embassy officials were active in promoting religious tolerance, sponsoring interfaith centers in the cities of Shkoder, Elbasan, and Tirana and engaging young persons, women, and other community members in joint activities such as seminars and community gatherings.

During the reporting period, the Embassy sent one prominent religious leader to the United States through the International Visitor Leadership Program. Embassy officials continued to urge the Government to address religious property claims and return buildings, land, and other property to religious groups that lost them under communist rule.

ALGERIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and opinion and permits citizens to establish institutions whose aims include the protection of fundamental liberties of the citizen. The Constitution declares Islam the state religion and prohibits institutions from engaging in behavior incompatible with Islamic morality. Ordinance 06-03 provides for the freedom of non-Muslims to practice religious rites, on condition that the exercise thereof is in keeping with the ordinance, the Constitution, and other laws and regulations and that public order, morality, and the rights and basic freedoms of others are respected. The law prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims, but it is not always enforced.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. In February 2008 the Government began enforcing Ordinance 06-03, which regulates non-Muslim religious practice. The ordinance increased restrictions on non-Muslim worship, including court proceedings and fines against some Christian converts; however, the number of court cases during the reporting period as compared to the previous period decreased significantly. The Government reportedly did not approve any requests for registration by non-Muslim religious associations, including Christian groups that attempted to comply with the ordinance. The governmental National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Services, created by the ordinance to regulate the registration process, met quarterly yet did not establish an administrative means to implement the ordinance again this reporting period. Government officials made public statements that criticized evangelism and emphasized the dominant role of Islam in society. There were claims of government restrictions on worship, including the denial of visas to religious workers, the ordered departure of one religious worker affiliated with a Catholic order, and confiscation of Bibles.

Although society generally tolerates foreigners and citizens who practice religions other than Islam, some local converts to Christianity kept a low profile out of concern for their personal safety and potential legal and social problems. Radical Islamists harassed and threatened the personal security of some converts to Christianity. Islamists continued to justify their killing of security force members and civilians by referring to interpretations of religious texts. Muslim religious and political leaders publicly criticized acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. Anti-Semitic articles occasionally appeared in the independent press. Press

reports concerning riots between Maliki and Ibadi Muslim groups in Berriane suggested that sectarian differences contributed to the violence.

The Ambassador and embassy officers raised concerns about religious discrimination with senior government officials. Specifically, officials from the Embassy and the State Department raised concerns with the Government concerning its order to close churches, its treatment of Muslim citizens who wish to convert to other religious groups, and lack of progress in registering non-Muslim religious organizations. The U.S. Government also discussed religious freedom with representatives of religious groups and members of civil society.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 919,595 square miles and a population of 36 million. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There is a small community of Ibadi Muslims in the province of Ghardaia. Unofficial estimates of the number of Christian and Jewish citizens vary between 12,000 and 50,000. The vast majority of Christians and Jews fled the country following independence from France in 1962. In the 1990s, many of the remaining Christians and Jews emigrated due to acts of terrorism committed by Muslim extremists. According to Christian community leaders, evangelical Christians, mostly in the Kabylie region, account for the largest number of Christians, followed by Methodists and members of other Protestant denominations, Roman Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists. A significant proportion of Christian foreign residents are students and illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa seeking to reach Europe; their numbers are difficult to estimate.

For security reasons, due mainly to the civil conflict, Christians concentrated in the large cities of Algiers, Annaba, and Oran in the mid-1990s.

During the reporting period, the press occasionally reported that Christian proselytizing had resulted in significant numbers of Muslims in the Kabylie region converting to Christianity; however, Christian sources reported those figures as exaggerated. There were no standardized statistics on the number of religious conversions. Reporting suggests that citizens, not foreigners, made up the majority of those actively proselytizing in Kabylie.

Since 1994 the Jewish community has diminished to less than 2,000 members due to fears of terrorist violence. The Jewish community was not active, and the synagogues remained closed.

In Algiers, church services are attended primarily by members of the diplomatic community, expatriate Westerners, sub-Saharan African migrants, and a few local Christians.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and opinion and permits citizens to establish institutions whose aims include the protection of fundamental liberties of the citizen. The Constitution declares Islam the state religion and prohibits institutions from engaging in behavior incompatible with Islamic morality.

Ordinance 06-03 provides for the freedom of non-Muslims to practice religious rites, on condition that the exercise thereof is in keeping with the ordinance, the Constitution, and other laws and regulations and that public order, morality, and the rights and basic freedoms of others are respected. The law prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims, but it is not always enforced.

Conversion is not illegal under civil law, and apostasy is not a criminal offense. The Government permits missionary groups to conduct humanitarian activities as long as they do not proselytize.

Ordinance 06-03, which entered into effect in September 2006 and has been enforced since February 2008, limits the practice of non-Muslim religions, restricts public assembly for the purpose of worship, and calls for the creation of a national commission to regulate the registration process. The ordinance requires organized religious groups to register with the Government, controls the importation of religious texts, and orders fines and punishments for individuals who proselytize Muslims. Many representatives of churches and some human rights organizations reported that the Government has not provided the administrative means to process and approve requests to register non-Muslim religious groups under the ordinance. The National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Services, the governmental entity responsible for regulating the registration process for non-Muslim religious groups, reportedly had not approved any requests for accreditation by non-Muslim religious associations by the end of the reporting period. Christian citizens who converted from Islam reportedly constitute the vast majority of the groups who have sought legal registration.

Because the Government has not registered any new churches since enforcing Ordinance 06-03 in February 2008, many Christian citizens continue to meet in unofficial "house churches," which are often homes or businesses of church members. Some of these groups meet openly, while others secretly hold worship services in homes.

Ordinance 06-03 made proselytizing a criminal offense, and established the punishment for it as one to three years in jail and a maximum fine of \$6,945 (500,000 dinars) for lay individuals and three to five years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$13,890 (one million dinars) for religious leaders. The law stipulates a maximum of five years in jail and a \$6,945 (500,000 dinars) fine for anyone who "incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion; or by using to this end establishments of teaching, education, health, social, culture, training...or any financial means." Anyone who makes, stores, or distributes printed documents, audiovisual materials, or the like with the intent of "shaking the faith" of a Muslim may also be punished in this manner.

Some aspects of the law and many traditional social practices discriminate against women. The Family Code, which draws on Shari'a, treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. Under the code, Muslim women are prevented from marrying non-Muslims, although this regulation is not always enforced. The code does not prohibit Muslim men from marrying non-Muslim women, but it prohibits them from marrying a woman of a non-monotheistic religious group. Under the law, children born to a Muslim father are Muslim, regardless of the mother's religion. In rulings on divorce, custody of the children normally is awarded to the mother, but she may not enroll them in a particular school or take them out of the country without the father's authorization. Under the 2005 Family Code amendments, women no longer need the consent of a male guardian (tuteur) to marry. The code only requires that a chaperone (wali) of her choosing be present at the wedding. This change signaled a major advance for women, as the role of a tuteur--usually a woman's father or other male relative--is to conclude the marriage on the woman's behalf, while a wali acts as a protector who is present while the woman concludes the marriage herself.

The Family Code also affirms the Islamic practice of allowing a man to marry up to four wives; however, he must obtain the consent of the current spouse, or spouses, the intended new spouse, and a judge. Furthermore, a woman has the right to a no-polygamy clause in a prenuptial agreement. Polygamy rarely occurs in practice, accounting for only 1 percent of marriages.

Women suffer from discrimination in inheritance claims. The Family Code, which derives inheritance rules from Shari'a, states that women are entitled to a smaller portion of a deceased husband's estate than his male children or brothers. Non-Muslim religious minorities may also suffer in inheritance claims when a Muslim family member lays claim to the same inheritance. Women may take out business loans and are the sole custodians of their dowries; however, in practice women do not always have exclusive control over assets they bring to a marriage or income they have earned. Females under 18 years of age may not travel abroad without the permission of a male legal guardian.

The Constitution prohibits non-Muslims from running for the presidency. Non-Muslims may hold other public offices and work within the Government; however, reports state that they are not promoted to senior posts and they hide their religious affiliation.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs provides financial support to mosques and pays the salary of imams. The Government and private contributions of local believers fund mosque construction. The Ministry's Educational Commission is composed of 28 members who are in charge of developing the educational system for teaching the Qur'an. The Commission is responsible for establishing policy for hiring teachers for the Qur'anic schools and madrassahs, as well as ensuring that all imams are well qualified and that the imams instruction follows government guidelines aimed at stemming Islamist extremism.

The Ministries of National Education and Religious Affairs strictly require, regulate, and fund the study of Islam in public schools. There are 118 private schools (primary and secondary); however, the Government has not accredited all of these institutions, pending a review of their educational programs as required by the Ministry of National Education. The Government stated that the purpose of this measure is to ensure that all private schools follow the national curriculum endorsed by the Government, including teaching about Islam, and that Arabic is the primary language of instruction. Consequently, some private school students have to register as independent students within the public school system to take national baccalaureate examinations.

The Government observes the following Islamic holy days as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Awal Moharem, and Ashura.

The Ministries of Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Commerce all must approve the importation of non-Islamic religious writings. Often, delays of five to six months occur before obtaining such approval, and there have been further delays once books reach customs. The Government periodically restricts the importation of Arabic and Tamazight (Berber) translations of non-Islamic religious texts. The Government stated that its purpose is to ensure that the number of texts imported is proportional to the estimated number of adherents of religious groups.

It is legal for citizens and foreigners to bring personal copies of non-Islamic religious texts, such as the Bible, into the country. Non-Islamic religious texts, music, and video cassettes are available, and two stores in the capital sell Bibles in several languages. Government-owned radio stations continued their practice of broadcasting Christmas and Easter services in French. The Government prohibits the dissemination of any literature that portrays violence as a legitimate precept of Islam.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, female employees of the Government are allowed to wear the hijab (headscarf) or crosses but are forbidden to wear the niqab (Islamic veil that covers the face).

The law requires religious groups to register their organizations with the Government prior to conducting any religious activity. The Catholic Church is the only officially recognized non-Muslim religious group in the country. The Anglican, Seventh-day Adventist, and other Protestant churches have pending registration requests with the Government and report no government interference in holding services.

Articles 5 through 11 of Ordinance 06-03 outline enforceable restrictions, which stipulate that all structures intended for the exercise of non-Muslim worship must be registered by the state. The articles also require that any modification of a structure to allow non-Muslim worship is subject to prior government approval and that such worship may only take place in structures exclusively intended and approved for that purpose.

In May 2007 the Government issued Executive Decree 07-135, which gave greater precision to Article 8 of the Ordinance, specifying the manner and conditions under which religious services of non-Muslims may take place. The decree specifies that a request for permission to observe non-Muslim religious rites must be submitted to the wali (governor) at least five days before the event and that the

event must occur in buildings accessible to the public. Requests must include information on three principal organizers of the event, its purpose, the number of attendees anticipated, a schedule of events, and its planned location. The organizers also must obtain a permit indicating this information and present it to authorities upon request. Under the decree, the wali can request that the organizers move the place of observance or an event or deny permission for it to take place if it is deemed a danger to public order.

In June 2007 the Government issued Executive Decree 07-158, which gave greater precision to Article 9 of the Ordinance, specifying the composition of the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Services and the regulations that govern it. It establishes that the Minister of Religious Affairs and Awqaf (Religious Endowments) presides over the Commission, which is composed of senior representatives of the Ministries of National Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, National Security, the National Police, the National Gendarmerie, and the governmental National Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CNCPPDH). Individuals within Christian communities reported that they were not consulted on the formation of the Commission. Individuals and groups who believe they are not being treated fairly by the Ministry of Religious Affairs may address their concerns to the CNCPPDH.

Government officials assert that Ordinance 06-03 is designed to apply to non-Muslims the same constraints it imposes on Muslims. In practice, Ordinance 06-03 and the Penal Code enable the Government to shut down any informal religious service that takes place in private homes or in secluded outdoor settings. Imams are hired and trained by the state and observances of Muslim services, with the exception of daily prayers, can only be performed in state-sanctioned mosques. Article 87 bis 10 of the penal code states that only government-authorized imams can lead prayer in mosques.

In September 2008 local press reported that the Ministry of Religious Affairs dismissed 53 imams and closed 42 locations used for unauthorized Islamic worship.

The Government appoints imams to mosques and provides general guidance on sermon topics. The Government legally may prescreen and approve sermons before they are delivered publicly during Friday prayers. In practice, each wilaya (province) and daïra (county) employs religious officials to review sermon content.

All persons, including imams recognized by the Government, are prohibited from speaking during prayers at the mosque in a manner that is "contrary to the noble nature of the mosque or likely to offend the cohesion of society or serve as a justification for such actions." If an imam's sermon is suspected by a ministry inspector of being inappropriate, he can be convoked to a "Scientific Council" composed of Islamic law scholars and other imams who assess the correctness of the sermon. An imam can be relieved of duty if convoked multiple times. The Government's right of review has not been exercised with non-Islamic religious groups. The Government also monitors activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses and bars the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours.

Article 87 bis 10 of the Penal Code establishes strict punishments, including fines of up to \$2,780 (200,000 dinars) and prison sentences of one to three years, for anyone other than a government-designated imam who preaches in a mosque. Harsher punishments were established for any person, including government-designated imams, who acts "against the noble nature of the mosque" or acts in a manner "likely to offend public cohesion." The law does not specify what actions would constitute such acts.

The country has no hate crime legislation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to implement Ordinance 06-03, including court proceedings and fines against some Christian converts. The Government began applying Ordinance 06-03 in February 2008, which resulted in the closure of approximately 27 churches and legal action against members of some Christian groups. The Government maintained that it was acting in accordance with the law when it ordered the church closures because the churches were not registered. The churches ordered closed included both house churches and buildings of long-established churches within and outside of the Kabylie region.

Christian leaders reported that the Government did not register their organizations and places of worship despite efforts to comply with the ordinance. Many Christian groups indicated that they had repeatedly attempted to register with the Government but were unsuccessful, facing a lack of information and a local government bureaucracy ignorant of the process. Some applicants reported that some government administrative officials indicated their unwillingness to process applications, even if an administrative process existed.

Although the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Services convened quarterly, most recently on April 7, 2009, it did not establish an administrative means to implement the ordinance and Christian practitioners reported that it did not approve any requests for accreditation by their religious associations. The governmental commission was created to regulate the registration process established by Ordinance 06-03.

Leaders of the Anglican Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and other Protestant churches reported that their applications for registration remained pending, in some cases for more than three years. Some said the Ministry of Religious Affairs offered occasional legal guidance on association laws and noted that complicated bureaucratic rules sometimes required that applications be resubmitted. According to reports, some Christian groups did not attempt to obtain legal status from the Government. During the reporting period, church groups reported that approximately 22 churches that lacked government recognition reopened and held services.

The Interior Ministry has the sole authority to grant association rights to religious or non-religious groups. The difficulties faced by religious groups in obtaining legal status are the same as those faced by non-religious civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, and others, whose petitions to the Interior Ministry are generally met with silence rather than documented refusal.

Church groups stated that the Government denied the visa applications of some religious workers, citing the government ban on proselytizing.

In 2008 the Government ordered the closure of a small school in Tamanrasset run by Catholic missionaries as a social welfare service for illegal immigrants. On March 24, 2009, the Ministry of Interior ordered a Catholic volunteer who had worked for the school to depart the country. The Government also ended delivery of the group's religious magazines.

On March 24, 2009, in an interview with French-language daily *El Watan*, the president of the High Islamic Council, Cheikh Bouamrane, denied Christians were persecuted in the country and said that the "aggressive" approach of many evangelists necessitated the elaboration of Ordinance 06-03.

On March 17, 2009, the Arabic-language daily *Ennahar* reported that the Director of Religious Affairs in Oran stated foreign entities exploit the poverty of some families for the purposes of evangelization.

On February 12, 2009, the Arabic-language daily *Sawt Al Ahrar* reported that customs officials referred two French women arriving from Marseilles to the Algiers prosecutor on charges of evangelization after officers discovered in the women's possession 129 copies of the Bible translated into Arabic.

On November 18, 2008, an appeals court in Algiers reduced the sentence from three years' imprisonment to two months of time served for three men convicted of smoking during Ramadan. On September 21, 2008, authorities arrested the men and detained them for the duration of their trial.

On October 5, 2008, a court in Biskra fined six Muslim residents \$1,670 (120,000 dinars) each for eating and playing cards during daylight hours of Ramadan. Six days later an appeals court judge overruled the decision, stating that the original sentence violated the Constitution, which provides for freedom of belief.

On January 30, 2008, the Maghnia Court issued a one-year suspended prison sentence to a foreign Catholic priest for praying with Cameroonian migrants in an unauthorized place of worship. Upon appeal, he received a reduced suspended prison sentence of two months and a fine of \$303 (20,150 Dinars). He filed a new appeal, which was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Christian leaders representing several groups reported that they have been unable to import Bibles and other printed religious materials since 2005. Press reports indicated that police confiscated some Bibles in various wilayas during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On December 31, 2008, authorities again postponed the trial of Habiba Kouider, with no indication of when the court would announce its verdict. On March 30, 2008, Kouider, a convert to Christianity, was charged in the western town of Tiaret with "practicing a non-Muslim religion without a permit." Kouider was traveling by bus when police questioned her and found her to be carrying Bibles and other religious materials. According to press reports, the prosecutor told her that if she reverted to Islam, he would drop the case. In a hearing before a local judge, the Tiaret prosecutor asked that Kouider be sentenced to three years in prison. On

May 27, 2008, the Tiaret court referred the case for additional investigation. Her case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

On October 29, 2008, a court in Ain al-Turck, near Oran, acquitted Youssef Ourahmane, Rachid Seghir, and another convert to Christianity on charges of blasphemy. In February 2008, the three men faced charges under Ordinance 06-03 for "blaspheming the name of the Prophet (Muhammad) and Islam."

On July 3, 2008, a court in Tissemsilt gave Christian converts Rachid Seghir and Djammal Dahmani six-month suspended prison sentences and fines of \$1,390 (100,000 dinars) each on charges of proselytizing and illegally practicing a non-Muslim faith. On June 25, 2008, the court began a retrial of the two Christian converts, whom it had originally convicted in absentia on November 20, 2007, to two years in prison and fines of \$6,945 (500,000 dinars) each on the same charges.

On June 8, 2008, a Tiaret court handed Rachid Seghir a six-month suspended prison sentence and a fine of \$2,780 (200,000 dinars) on charges of evangelism. The courts in Tiaret and Djilfa charged five other Christian converts, Jillali Saidi, Abdelhak Rabih, Chaaban Baikel, Mohamed Khan, and Abdelkader Hori, on the same grounds as Seghir. Saidi, Rabih, and Baikel received two-month suspended prison sentences and fines of \$1,390 (100,000 dinars) each; Khan and Hori were acquitted.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In general, society tolerates foreigners who practice religions other than Islam. Although some local converts to Christianity keep a low profile out of concern for their personal safety and potential legal and social problems, many openly practice their new religion.

Radical Islamists, who seek to rid the country of those who do not share their extremist interpretation of Islam, committed violent acts and posed a significant security threat. Moderate Muslim religious and political leaders publicly criticized

acts of violence committed in the name of Islam, such as the August 19, 2008 suicide bomb attack in Issers that killed 46 and injured 45 civilians.

A very small number of citizens, such as Ibadi Muslims living in the desert town of Ghardaia, practice non-mainstream forms of Islam or other religions and generally experience minimal discrimination. Press reports concerning August 2008 riots between Maliki and Ibadi Muslim groups in Berriane, near Ghardaia, suggested that sectarian differences contributed to the violence. There were no reports, however, of religious persecution or any official or unofficial restrictions on Ibadi Muslims against practicing their religion.

Anti-Semitism in state-owned publications and broadcasts was rare; however, anti-Semitic articles appeared occasionally in the independent press, especially Arabic-language newspapers with an Islamic outlook.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador and other embassy and Department of State officials raised U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with senior government officials. Specifically, U.S. officials raised concerns with the Government concerning its order to close churches, the treatment of Muslim citizens who wish to convert to other religious groups, and the lack of progress in registering non-Muslim religious organizations.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials met regularly with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as permitted. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also met with members of the Muslim Scholars Association and several national scholars of Islamic studies throughout the reporting period, as well as with several Christian and Jewish groups. Embassy officials attended seminars on religious tolerance and concepts of Islam specific to the country, often sponsored by the Government and national religious organizations. The U.S. Embassy met with religious leaders of Muslim and Christian communities and with the CNCPPDH.

During the reporting period, the Embassy further underscored the need for religious tolerance by funding two ongoing cultural restoration projects with religious significance for both Christians and Muslims. The Embassy maintained contact with three Islamic political parties (Movement for a Peaceful Society, Movement for National Reform, and Islamic Renaissance Movement).

PRINCIPALITY OF ANDORRA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 180 square miles and a population of 85,000. Few official statistics are available on religion; traditionally, 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The population consists largely of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, and France, with citizens constituting 37 percent of inhabitants. Generally, immigrants are also Catholic. It is estimated that one-half of Catholics are active church attendees. Other Christian groups include the New Apostolic Church; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); several Protestant denominations, including the Anglican Church; the Reunification Church; and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious groups include Muslims (primarily two thousand North African immigrants divided into two groups, one of which is more fundamentalist); Jews (an estimated one hundred); and Hindus.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution, however, acknowledges a special relationship with the Catholic Church "in accordance with Andorran tradition" and recognizes the "full legal capacity" of the bodies of the Catholic Church, granting them legal status "in accordance with their own rules." The Catholic Church receives some privileges, although no direct subsidies, not

available to other religious groups. One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the president of France) is Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia of the Spanish town of La Seu d'Urgell.

The Government observes the Catholic religious celebration on September 8 of the Verge de Meritxell (Virgin of Meritxell) as national day, as well as Easter, Whit Sunday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religious groups and religious worship. The law of associations is very general and does not specifically mention religious organizations. A consolidated register of associations records all types of associations, including religious groups. Registration is not compulsory; however, groups must register or reregister to be considered for the support that the Government provides to nongovernmental organizations. For example, the Government provides support to Caritas, the Andorran Migrant Women's Association, and the Andorran Women's Association. To register or reregister, a group must provide its statutes and foundation agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to board or other official positions in the organization, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organization. There were no reports of rejected applications.

The authorities reportedly expressed concern that some methods allegedly used by certain religious organizations (brainwashing or physical abuse, for example) might prove injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order. These authorities questioned how they might proceed in such cases but did not mention a specific instance. The law does not limit such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his or her will."

The Government does not assign or grant space for places of worship. Such decisions are handled at the local (parish) government level. In spite of negotiations for some years between the Muslim community and the Government, no mosque has been built, apparently due to a lack of unity within the Muslim community. Nevertheless, the country's estimated 2000 Muslims have "prayer spaces," and there appear to be no restrictions on the number of these places of worship scattered throughout the country.

Instruction in the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Islamic Cultural Center provided approximately 50 students with Arabic lessons. By the end of the reporting period, the Government and the Moroccan community, the largest Muslim group in the country, had not agreed upon a system that would allow children to receive Arabic instruction in school outside of the regular school day. The Government was willing to offer Arabic classes, but the Muslim community was not able to find an imam to teach. The Ombudsman received no complaints from the Muslim community on this issue.

On occasion the Government makes public facilities available to religious organizations for religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Societal attitudes among religious groups appeared to be amicable and tolerant. For example, the Catholic Church of la Massana lends its sanctuary twice per month to the Anglican community, so that visiting Anglican clergy can conduct services for the English-speaking community. Although those who practice religions other than Catholicism tend to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there were few if any obstacles to their practicing their own religions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

ANGOLA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although it made registration difficult for minority religious groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 481,351 square miles and a population of 17 million. The majority of the population is Christian and Roman Catholics are the largest religious group. The Catholic Church estimates that 55 percent of the population is Catholic, while the Government estimates 70 percent; neither figure could be independently verified. Data from the National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR) indicate that 25 percent of the population adheres to African Christian denominations; 10 percent follows Protestant traditions, including Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Congregationalist (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God; and 5 percent belongs to Brazilian evangelical churches. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or indigenous religious beliefs. There is a small Muslim community, unofficially estimated at 80,000 to 90,000 adherents, perhaps one-half of whom are migrants from West Africa or of Lebanese origin.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government continued its ban on 17 religious groups in Cabinda on charges of practicing harmful exorcism rituals on adults and children accused of witchcraft, illegally holding religious services in residences, and lack of official registration.

The Government observes Good Friday and Christmas as national holidays.

The Media Law requires nonpublic radio networks to have a physical presence in a province to broadcast there. This requirement limits the reach of religious media such as the Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia, which hosts spirited political debates that are at times critical of government policies.

The Government requires religious groups to petition for legal status with the Ministries of Justice and Culture. Legal status gives religious groups the right to act as juridical persons in the court system, secures their standing as officially registered religious groups, and allows them to construct schools and churches. Groups must provide general background information and have at least 100,000 adult adherents to qualify for registration. This high membership threshold poses a barrier to registration and the accompanying benefits of legal status.

The Ministries of Justice and Culture recognize 85 denominations but did not register any religious groups during the reporting period. More than 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical groups, had registration applications pending with INAR, which did not process them, as the groups failed to demonstrate that they had at least 100,000 members. Nonetheless, the Government did not bar the activities of these groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In March 2009 the head of INAR, Maria de Fatima Republicano Viegas, said the Government was concerned about Islam in the country and would investigate the activities of all mosques over concerns that Islamic practices go against cultural norms. The domestic intelligence service (SINFO), charged with compiling a report on mosque activities, has begun conducting these investigations. Republicano described Islam as alien to the culture and traditions of the country and claimed it victimized women who married Muslim men.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Public attitudes toward Islam were generally negative. Cultural differences between native Angolans and Muslim West African immigrants were cited as a basis for negative views toward Islam, as was the perceived link between Islam and illegal immigration.

Governmental agencies, church groups, and civil society organizations continued campaigns against indigenous religious practices that involve shamans, animal sacrifices, or "witchcraft." The stated goal of these campaigns was to discourage abusive practices, in particular exorcism rituals, which included willful neglect or physical abuse. In October 2008 police closed two African Christian churches in Luanda and Cabinda following allegations that the churches' spiritual leaders detained and mistreated approximately 40 children.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 170 square miles and a population of 86,000. According to the 2001 census, 74 percent of the population is Christian. The Anglican Church is the largest religious group, accounting for an estimated 26 percent of the population. The Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches account for less than 10 percent each. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims an estimated 25 percent of the population, and Jehovah's Witnesses number more than 1,000 members. Non-Christians include an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Rastafarians, more than 200 Muslims, nearly 200 Hindus, and approximately 50 members of the Baha'i Faith.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government is secular; however, the Government maintains a close relationship with the Antigua Christian Council. The Prime Minister is responsible for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, whose role is to coordinate greater

interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the entry of religious workers into the country.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups are required to incorporate to own property. Registered groups receive tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and renovation.

Public schools are secular; religious education is not part of the curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was prohibited.

The Baha'i community alleged that government officials at all levels denied their repeated requests to schedule meetings with them. They attributed this to their persistent calls for the Government to abstain from voting on the "no action motion" at the U.N. on human rights in Iran.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious

affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy also discussed religious freedom with local religious groups.

ARGENTINA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,068,302 square miles and a population of 37 million, according to the 2001 census. A 2008 estimate of the population is 40.7 million. Accurate estimates of religious affiliation are difficult to obtain due to legal prohibitions on including religion in the census; however, data from a study conducted by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and the National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology (FONCyT) produced the following estimates: Roman Catholics, 76 percent of the population; agnostics or atheists, 11 percent; and Pentecostals, 8 percent. Baptists, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, and adherents of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God total fewer than 5 percent of the population.

The Islamic Center estimates that one of every three Middle Eastern immigrants is Muslim. Descendants of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, approximately half of whom are Orthodox Catholic or Maronite, constitute a significant portion of the population with Middle Eastern roots. The Muslim community is composed of 500,000 to 600,000 members, of whom 70 percent are Sunni and 30 percent Shi'ite, according to estimates by the Sunni-dominated Islamic Center.

Leaders of diverse religious groups noted the recent growth of evangelical Protestant communities due to conversion, principally in newer evangelical churches. Religious leaders also noted the impact of global secularization on religious demography.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and its partial amendments provide for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution grants all residents the right "to profess their faith freely" and states that foreigners enjoy all the civil rights of citizens. Law 21.745 of 1978, as modified by decree 2037/79 of 1979 and resolution 167/97 of 1997, provides the legal framework for religious freedom.

By constitutional and legal obligation, the Government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith" and provides a variety of unique subsidies to the Catholic Church to compensate for expropriation of church property in the colonial era. According to the Stewardship Council of the Argentine Catholic Bishops' Conference, in 2008 subsidies to the Catholic Church were approximately \$4.75 million (ARS 18,100,000) and represented approximately 0.01 percent of the national budget. The stipends are exempt from the equivalent of income tax, social security, and Medicare. The Catholic Church also enjoys institutional privileges such as school subsidies, a large degree of autonomy for parochial schools, and licensing preferences for radio frequencies. Catholic organizations must register with the Registry of Institutions of Consecrated Life in the Secretariat of Worship in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Worship, which officially recognizes approximately 500 Catholic organizations.

The Secretariat of Worship is responsible for conducting the Government's relations with religious organizations. On November 24, 2008, the Secretariat of Worship, with the national Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the City of Buenos Aires Ministry of Education, observed Religious Freedom Day in recognition of U.N. resolution 36/55 of 1981. The Secretariat of Worship also sought to promote religious harmony by sending official representatives to events such as religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashana and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches. On May 25, 2009, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner invited leaders representing several religious groups to celebrate the Government's official

ceremony for the 199th anniversary of the May Revolution in an interfaith celebration in Misiones. In addition, President Fernandez de Kirchner met with Catholic Church prelates, Jewish groups, and other religious leaders several times during the reporting period.

Both the Federal Government and the government of the Province of Buenos Aires promote multilateral dialogue with diverse sectors of the community, including religious representatives. For instance, the National Consultative Council for Social Policies meets weekly under the coordination of the National Minister of Social Welfare, gathering representatives of labor and business groups, government, religious and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and unemployment associations.

The Government observes Good Friday, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas as national holidays. The law authorizes seven days of paid leave for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and also for those observing the religious celebrations of the Islamic New Year.

Legal status is a key concern for religious groups. By law a non-Catholic religious organization must register with the Secretariat of Worship as a civic rather than religious association and must report periodically to maintain its status. On average, the registration process takes six months. The Secretariat of Worship considers the following criteria: having a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy. Registration is not required for private religious services such as in homes but is necessary for public activities. Some long-established religious groups value this system, while other religious groups find it discriminatory. Registration is also necessary to obtain tax-exempt status. According to the Secretariat of Worship, more than 4,000 religious groups are registered, more than 90 percent of which are Protestant groups.

Foreign missionaries of registered religious organizations may apply to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities to request issuance of the appropriate documents. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were denied visas.

The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), a government agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes. INADI, whose board includes representatives of the major religious

groups, investigates violations of a law that prohibits discrimination based on "race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, gender, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics." The agency also conducts educational programs, supports victims of discrimination, and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination. For example, INADI's religious freedom forum holds monthly meetings with leaders across the religious spectrum. INADI also sponsored 18 events advocating religious freedom during the reporting period.

In February 2009 the Government ordered Richard Williamson, a British traditionalist Catholic and bishop of the Society of St. Pius X, to leave the country or face expulsion after his views denying the full extent of the Holocaust provoked public outcry. In its explanation of the decision, the Government cited document irregularities in Williamson's 2003 visa application. The Vatican, which in January 2009 lifted a 1988 excommunication order against Williamson, declared he would have to publicly retract his remarks before he could resume ecclesiastical duties.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which may be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches, synagogues, and mosques operate private schools, including seminaries and universities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to foster, sponsor, and participate in interfaith dialogues, including high-profile events such as Religious Freedom Day in

November 2008. The country is an active member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations (DAIA) maintains a database tracking anti-Semitic incidents and reported that the number of incidents in 2008 sharply decreased. In 2008 DAIA registered approximately 202 complaints, a decrease of 178 incidents from 2007. The most commonly reported incidents were desecration of Jewish cemeteries, anti-Semitic graffiti, verbal slurs, and other forms of harassment.

In May 2009 approximately 20 Argentine members of the Revolutionary Action Front carrying weapons and a banner with the words "Israel, genocide" attacked the participants of a commemoration held by the city of Buenos Aires celebrating the 61st anniversary of the creation of the Jewish state. The authorities arrested nine persons who remained in pretrial detention at the end of the reporting period.

The international investigation continued into the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 persons. In May 2008 a federal prosecutor called for the indictment of former President Carlos Menem, former federal judge Juan Galeano, and others for their alleged roles in covering up and protecting those involved in the attack. Subsequently, the presiding federal judge, following recommendations from the AMIA Special Prosecutor, issued an international request for the seizure of assets belonging to eight Iranians and Hezbollah members to cover damages being claimed in the civil suit brought against the perpetrators. In December 2008 the judge ordered the seizure of six commercial properties allegedly belonging to a former Iranian cultural attaché who was among those accused of aiding the attack, and in March 2009 the judge seized another five commercial properties in the Province of Buenos Aires.

In January 2009 leftist organizations staged anti-Israeli demonstrations exploiting anti-Semitic imagery outside the Israeli Embassy, the headquarters of the AMIA, and a hotel owned by a Jewish Argentine businessman and treasurer of the World Jewish Congress to protest Israeli military operations in Gaza. While INADI

acknowledged the protesters' right to free speech, it condemned the use of anti-Semitic imagery and lodged a criminal complaint over the discriminatory graffiti and banner used during the protests.

In August 2008 a court sentenced Raul Arenas Vega to nine months in prison for the 2006 beating of an Orthodox Jewish teenager in Buenos Aires.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers met periodically with various religious leaders and attended events organized by faith-based organizations and NGOs that addressed religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy also supports a program to build understanding among youth from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. Outreach to educators and law enforcement officials to enhance their understanding of and respect for different religious practices is an element of this project.

ARMENIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law places some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of minority religious groups.

The Government generally did not enforce existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 11,500 square miles and a population of 3 million. Approximately 98 percent of the population is ethnic Armenian. The link between Armenian ethnicity and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church (Armenian Church) is strong. An estimated 90 percent of citizens nominally belong to the Armenian Church, which is one of six ancient autocephalous Eastern churches and which has its spiritual center (Mother See) located at the Etchmiadzin cathedral and monastery near the capital of Yerevan.

There are small communities of other religious groups. There was no reliable census data on religious minorities, and estimates from congregants varied significantly. Groups constituting less than 5 percent of the population include: Roman Catholics, Armenian Uniate (Mekhitarist) Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Armenian Evangelical Christians, Molokans, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, various groups of charismatic Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Yezidis (non-Muslim Kurds who practice Yezidism), Jews, Sunni Muslim Kurds, Shi'ite Muslims, Baha'is, and others.

Yezidis are concentrated primarily in agricultural areas around Mount Aragats, northwest of Yerevan. Armenian Catholics live primarily in the north, while most Jews, Mormons, Baha'is, and Orthodox Christians reside in Yerevan, along with a

small community of mostly Shi'ite Muslims, including Iranians, and temporary residents from the Middle East.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the right to practice, choose, or change religious belief. Concurrently, it recognizes "the exclusive mission of the Armenian Church as a national church in the spiritual life, development of the national culture, and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia." The Constitution and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations establish separation of church and state, but grant the Armenian Church official status as the national church.

The April 2007 Law on the Relations of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Church regulates the special relationship between the state and the Armenian Church and grants certain privileges to the Armenian Church that are not available to other religious groups. It makes the Armenian Church's marriage rite legally binding, but the supporting legal acts to enforce this are not yet in place. The law also allows the Armenian Church to have permanent representatives in hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools, military units, and all places of detentions, while the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations permits other religious organizations to have representatives in these places on demand only. In general, the Law on the Relations of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Church formally recognizes the moral as well as ethnic role that the Armenian Church plays in society, as most citizens see it as an integral part of national identity and cultural heritage.

The Government observes January 6, the day on which the Armenian Church celebrates Christmas, as a national holiday. During the year, the Government designates, through its decrees, five church observances as official Monday holidays, during which it is customary to visit the graves of loved ones. The preceding or following Saturdays are designated as workdays.

The law does not mandate registration of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious groups; however, only registered organizations have legal status. Only registered groups may publish more than 1,000 copies of newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor visitors' visas, although individual members may do so. To

qualify for registration, religious organizations must "be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature," have at least 200 adult members, and subscribe to a doctrine based on "historically recognized holy scriptures." The registration requirements do not refer to the religious organizations of national minorities. The Office of the State Registrar registers religious entities. The Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities oversees religious affairs and performs a consultative role in the registration process. There were no reports that the Government refused to register qualified religious groups that wanted to register.

The Law on Alternative Service allows conscientious objectors--subject to government panel approval--to perform either noncombatant military or labor service duties rather than serve as combat-trained military personnel. The law took effect in 2004 and applies to subsequent draftees and those serving prison terms for draft evasion. A January 2006 amendment to the Criminal Code criminalizes evasion of alternative labor service. However, conscientious objectors continued to maintain that military control of the alternative labor service amounted to unacceptable military service.

The Law on Education mandates that public schools offer a secular education. Only personnel authorized and trained by the Government may teach in public schools. Courses in the History of the Armenian Church are part of the public school curriculum and are taught by public school teachers. Course teacher qualifications are defined by the Armenian Church, which may also nominate candidates to teach the course. All religious organizations may establish groups for religious instruction to train their members, utilizing facilities belonging to or set aside for them. The law grants the Armenian Church the right to organize voluntary religious classes in state education institutions using the facilities and resources of those institutions.

On March 19, 2009, controversial draft changes to the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and the Criminal Code had their first reading in the National Assembly. The draft amendments would allow for an increase in the required number of members for a religious organization to legally register. They seek to legally define Christian belief as "the belief in Jesus Christ as God and Savior and an acceptance of the Holy Trinity" as a prerequisite for registering Christian religious organizations. These drafts also seek legally to define and criminalize "soul hunting," a term negatively used as a synonym for all types of proselytism. The introduction of these draft laws sparked contentious societal debate, with many local experts and religious freedom activists, as well as representatives of religious groups, viewing the drafts (which have yet to pass a

second reading to become law) as being aimed against religious minorities and religious diversity in the country. Following a request by the Armenian National Assembly, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief reviewed the draft legislation and their joint opinion was adopted by the Venice Commission during its June 12-13, 2009 plenary session. The joint review analyzed the original Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations together with the proposed legislation and was critical of both. The legal review concluded that while the draft laws took some important steps to improve the precision and the range of human rights guarantees as required by international commitments, they also raised several concerns and would require redrafting. The law currently in force would also require more extensive amendments than those proposed by the draft law under consideration. Among many other things the joint opinion recommended extensive redrafting of the current registration requirements, as well as deletion of the proposed definition of Christianity. The review disapproved of the proposed increase of members necessary for registration. The review also called for re-wording the offence of proselytism to ensure that the offence is clearly defined as one of "improper proselytism," that the definition of "improper proselytism" be drawn with greater care, and that the penalties be reconsidered as they could be unduly harsh. The progress of the draft in the National Assembly was halted by the summer recess. At the end of the reporting period there was no additional information to suggest how the Government planned to proceed with these drafts. The Government had not commented on the OSCE and Venice Commission feedback.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally did not enforce existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations prohibits but does not define "soul-hunting," a non-legal term perceived locally to describe both proselytism and forced conversion. The prohibition applies to all groups, including the Armenian Church. Most registered religious groups reported no significant legal impediments to their activities during the reporting period.

Although the law prohibits foreign funding of foreign-based denominations, the Government did not enforce the ban.

Throughout the reporting period, a group calling itself the "One Nation Party" continued, unimpeded by (and potentially with the tacit approval of) the authorities, to post leaflets in various areas of Yerevan denouncing Jehovah's Witnesses and warning against "sects." According to local observers, the same group, also referring to itself as the "One Nation Alliance of Organizations," distributed thousands of leaflets containing even more defamatory content throughout the country. The leaflets compare legally registered organizations in the country to "Satanists," labeling them all as "sects" engaged in antinational and destructive activities, and calling on Armenians to fight against them.

Throughout the reporting period, numerous minority religious groups reported a general trend of intolerance emerging in schools which involved targeting teachers and children involved in religious groups other than the Armenian Church. There were reports that teachers singled out children of minority religious groups during classes and that classmates targeted these children for abuse and mockery.

On May 11, 2009, Bishop Sepouh Chouldjian, the Primate of the Diocese of Gougar, held a meeting with school directors in Vanadzor, which was attended by Lori Governor Aram Kocharyan and other officials. The Bishop reportedly instructed those in attendance to work actively against "sects" in their institutions. The Governor said at the meeting that it was unacceptable to tolerate at schools "sects" and "soul-hunting" which were "widely spread in their reality." The meeting was covered by the news program of Lori TV, which reported that a similar meeting between Armenian Church clerics and school directors from the entire region had taken place earlier in the city of Spitak. On May 14, several media outlets quoted local observers and parents who reported that after the meeting teachers intimidated and threatened to punish their students for attending gatherings or events of "sects" (i.e., any religion other than the Armenian Church). The media also reported a claim by a Governor's Office employee who aimed to refute the reports saying that the meeting dealt solely with questions surrounding classes such as the History of the Armenian Church, Armenian History, Armenian Language, Armenian Literature, and the issue of "raising youth in a patriotic spirit."

Throughout the reporting period, a group calling itself "The Group of April 24" posted leaflets in Yerevan containing derogatory content regarding what it termed "sects." These leaflets also attacked legally registered minority religious groups, claiming they came from a "criminal origin." On April 18, 2009, a pro-government newspaper published a photo of one of these leaflets on its front page under the banner, "Someone should listen to what is being said."

On April 18, a visiting American Baptist Church choir named "The Singing Men of Oklahoma" began a week-long tour of Armenia in observance of Armenian Remembrance Day, which is observed annually on April 24. The day after the group's arrival, the Armenian Church criticized the visiting choir for posting on its website information that, according to the Armenian Church, proved them to be committed to defaming and converting the Armenian people. Several government-sponsored media outlets portrayed the group as insidious and "out to steal souls" during their visit. Despite the Singing Men's repeated repudiation of these claims, National Security Service (NSS) officers reportedly threatened the local head of the Armenian Baptist Church and those who operated venues where the choir was contracted to perform. By the time they departed Armenia on April 25, over half of the group's concerts had reportedly been forcibly cancelled.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the administration of Yerevan's School Number 94 failed to address ongoing harassment of their members' children. On November 24, 2008, police reportedly called on the offending teenagers who allegedly admitted that they had mocked their schoolmates out of dislike for their religious differences. The victims' families reported that the school principal had condemned their seeking police assistance; the principal's response led them to decide to enroll their children in a different school.

On June 8 an online news outlet published the statement of the founder of the Yerevan Evangelical Church, alleging that National Security Service employees had harassed the members of the Gyumri branch of the charitable religious NGO "International Services of Christian Culture" in late May by summoning and interrogating them for hours about the activities of the NGO in violation of proper legal procedures and without providing any valid reason, and mocking their faith and religious beliefs during the questioning. The media report alleged that the NSS fought "soul-hunting" in that manner. The harassment reportedly stopped after the founder of the Yerevan Evangelical Church (Levon Bardakjian), who is also the founder of the NGO, began to actively raise the issue at various state institutions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Compared to the previous reporting period, Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to shorter prison terms stemming from their conscientious objection to military service. From July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009, of 22 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced, three received 36-month sentences (the maximum allowed by law), 13 received 24-

month sentences, four received 30-month sentences, two received 26-month sentences, and one received a suspended sentence.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses leaders in Yerevan, as of June 30, 2009, 71 of their members remained in prison for refusal to perform military service or alternative labor service on conscientious and religious grounds, and one member remained in pretrial detention. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses stated that all of the prisoners had been given the opportunity to serve an alternative to military service rather than prison time, but refused because they objected to the fact that the military retained administrative control over the alternative service.

Other than Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Unlike during the previous reporting period, there were no anti-Semitic news reports in the Armenian media.

On May 11, 2009, in a ceremony attended by government officials, diplomats, and international scholars, the Jewish community unveiled government-sponsored renovations to an 800-year-old Jewish cemetery in the southern town of Yeghegis.

On March 20, the Jewish community inaugurated Friendship Alley, a government-funded tree-lined grove adjacent to Yerevan's WWII memorial, in honor of the Armenian and Jewish peoples' friendship and the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel.

On July 28, 2008, following the mediation of the country's Human Rights Defender, the military commissar sent a letter to the Jehovah's Witnesses informing them that all commissariats had been instructed to register and to provide passports to all persons who had been prosecuted for evading military service for conscientious reasons and had served their prison sentences. The letter stated that the Ministry of Defense and the military prosecutor did not object to the

registration of these citizens. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported significant improvement since then in military commissariats' treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses and reported no problems in the issuance of documents after completion of prison sentences.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, following a verbal agreement with the Deputy Prosecutor General, beginning spring 2008 only a few of their members who stood trial for evasion of alternative service were put under pretrial detention; in some cases they were not taken into custody until a month after the verdict on imprisonment was made, i.e. until the time when the verdict would come into legal effect. Some exceptions did occur due to local prosecutors being unaware of the decision of the Deputy Prosecutor General. In a letter addressed to the Jehovah's Witnesses on June 26, 2009, the Prosecutor General's office informed the group that an April 29 collegial session of the prosecutors reiterated to the regional prosecutors that pre-trial detention for those who did not evade the investigative bodies was inappropriate.

While occasional attacks on members of Jehovah's Witnesses engaged in Bible studies continued, the group commended the swift actions taken by the law-enforcement bodies toward the assailant in one such case. On July 13, 2008, a 53-year-old Yerevan resident attacked two Jehovah's Witnesses while they were preaching. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, on December 19, 2008, the attacker, Hayk Elizbarian, was found guilty on charges of insulting, threatening, and beating the victim and was fined approximately \$410 (150,000 drams). The Jehovah's Witnesses praised the professionalism of the Police and the Prosecutor's Office of Arabkir and Kanaker-Zeytun Communities of Yerevan in handling this case, and noted that this was the first verdict concerning an attack on one of their members.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Societal attitudes were ambivalent toward most minority religious groups. While many citizens are not religiously observant, the link between Armenian ethnicity and the Armenian Church is strong.

According to some observers, the general population expressed negative attitudes about all minority religious groups. According to local experts, however, these attitudes did not affect personal and neighborly relationships, but rather constituted a general perception of minority religious groups as threats to the state. Minority

religious groups at times continued to be targets of hostile sermons by Armenian Church clerics, and members of minority religious groups experienced societal discrimination and intolerance, including in the workplace.

Most media outlets continued to label religious groups other than the Armenian Church as "sects" in their broadcasting, and some transmitted negative programs about them. Various television stations broadcast discussions in which representatives of the Armenian Church and/or other participants labeled religious minority groups as enemies of the state and national unity.

In February 2009 Yerkir Media produced and repeatedly aired a film entitled "Soul Hunt," which negatively portrayed minority religious groups, labeled them as "sects," and accused them of extortion and endangering national security. An Armenian Church priest interviewed in the film said these groups intended to enslave people and used fraudulent means to recruit their members. The film, which was presented as a documentary, included obviously foreign footage showing crowds in trances, abused children, and theatrical enactments, and presented this "archival" footage as examples of activities of local religious groups.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that between April and May local residents tried to hinder the construction of a new worship center in Vanadzor. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, aggression by certain individuals escalated in the period between April 21 and May 15, as they threatened construction workers and dismantled and stole some tents and ropes. The police brought the situation under control on May 14, and the construction resumed without further incidents. According to media reports the residents opposed the construction of the worship center due to its proximity to a school and a kindergarten, and apprehensions that the group would convert their children.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government emphasized to authorities that continued eligibility for the Millennium Challenge Compact remained contingent upon the Government's performance in meeting good governance indicators, including respect for religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials maintained close contact with the Catholicos (primate of the Armenian Church) at Etchmiadzin and with leaders of other religious and ecumenical groups in the country. The Embassy maintained regular contact with

resident and visiting regional representatives of foreign-based religious groups and raised their concerns with the Government when necessary. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, participated in many religious communities' events to promote religious freedom.

AUSTRALIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 2.9 million square miles and a population of 21 million. According to the 2006 census, 64 percent of citizens consider themselves to be Christian, including 26 percent Roman Catholic, 19 percent Anglican, and 19 percent other Christian. Buddhists constitute 2.1 percent of the population, Muslims 1.7 percent, Hindus 0.7 percent, Jews 0.4 percent, and all others professing a religion 0.5 percent.

At the time of European settlement, aboriginal inhabitants followed religions that were animistic, involving belief in spirits behind the forces of nature and the influence of ancestral spirit beings. According to the 2006 census, 5,206 persons, or less than 0.03 percent of respondents, reported practicing aboriginal traditional religions, down from 5,244 in 2001. The 2006 census reported that almost 64 percent of Aborigines identify themselves as Christian and 20 percent listed no religion.

In 1911, during the first census, 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. In recent decades traditional Christian denominations have seen their total number and proportion of affiliates stagnate or decrease significantly, although from 2001 to 2006, the total number of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians increased by 12.9 percent. Over the past decade, increased immigration from Southeast Asia and the Middle East considerably expanded the numbers of

citizens who identify themselves as Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims and increased the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations. Between 2001 and 2006, the numbers increased for Buddhists by 17 percent (to 418,000), Muslims by 21 percent (to 340,393), Jews by 6 percent (to 89,000), and Hindus by 55 percent (to 148,131). In 2006 approximately 18.7 percent of citizens considered themselves to have no religion, up from 17 percent in 2001, and 11.2 percent made no statement regarding religious affiliation. According to a 2002 survey, 23 percent of adults had participated in church or religious activities during the previous three months.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution bars the federal government from making any law that imposes a state religion or religious observance, prohibits the free exercise of religion, or sets a religious test for a federal public office. These federal constitutional prohibitions do not restrict the legislative powers of the states.

The Government recognizes Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays. Although the Government is secular, each session of Parliament begins with a joint recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Religious adherents who have suffered religious discrimination may have recourse under federal discrimination laws or through the court system and bodies such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Federal laws which protect freedom of religion include the Racial Discrimination Act, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act, and the Workplace Relations Act.

Commonwealth and state public service agencies are active in promoting religious tolerance in the workplace. Australian Public Service employees who believe they have been denied a promotion on religious grounds can appeal to the Australian Public Service Merit Protection Commissioner.

The State of Tasmania is the only state or territory whose constitution specifically provides citizens with the right to profess and practice their religion. However, seven of the eight states and territories have laws prohibiting discrimination on the

basis of a person's religion or ethno-religious background. South Australia is the only jurisdiction that does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. All jurisdictions, apart from South Australia, have established independent agencies to mediate allegations of religious discrimination.

Minority religious groups were generally given equal rights to land and status and to build places of worship. However, in the past a number of small city councils refused local Muslim and Buddhist groups planning permits to construct places of worship.

Some of those religious groups successfully appealed the councils' decisions to the courts. In May 2009 the Land and Environment Court handed down a judgment allowing construction of a 1,200-student Islamic primary and secondary school in Bass Hill, a Sydney suburb, which had been fought by residents since the land was bought in 2006. In May 2008, a local council rejected an application "on planning grounds alone" to build an Islamic school in Camden, another Sydney suburb. At the end of the reporting period, an appeal was before the same Land and Environment Court. In April 2009, some Christian leaders opposed to the Camden school signed a letter warning that "the Quranic Society inevitably advocates a political ideological position that is incompatible with the Australian way of life."

Religious groups are not required to register. However, to receive tax-exempt status, nonprofit religious groups must apply to the Australian Tax Office (ATO). Registration with the ATO has no effect on how religious groups are monitored, apart from standard ATO checks.

The Government permits religious education in public schools, generally taught by volunteers using approved curriculum, with the option for parents to have their child not attend. The Government's National School Chaplaincy Program provides annual support of up to \$18,800 (A\$20,000) for government and nongovernment school communities seeking to establish or extend school chaplaincy services. As of June 2008, the Government had received 2,630 applications, representing 27 percent of all schools. Starting November 30, 2008, no new funding agreements could be entered into. The federal government provides funding to private schools, the majority of which are faith-based.

The Government has put in place extensive programs to promote respect for diversity and cultural pluralism. The country participates in the UN Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and is cosponsor of the Regional Interfaith Dialogue with Indonesia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. In December 2008

the Government established the Multicultural Advisory Council to provide advice on social "cohesion issues relating to Australia's cultural and religious diversity." The Government reshaped its flagship anti-racism program to better target potential problem areas and was working with Muslim leaders on the Advisory Council to develop de-radicalization programs for convicted terrorists. The Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs suggested that the Government form a Muslim Advisory Council.

In May 2008 the Government rejected Greens Party calls to launch a Senate inquiry into a Protestant denomination called the Exclusive Brethren, despite the Prime Minister previously denouncing the group an "extremist cult" that "breaks up families." The Government said an investigation would unreasonably interfere with group members' right to freely practice their faith. In March 2009 the Government removed an exemption in the Fair Work Bill that was used by the Exclusive Brethren to bar unions from entering their businesses.

In December 2008, the Government launched the National Human Rights Consultation to seek the views of the public on how to better protect human rights. It was due to report to the government by August 31, 2009. The consultation generated debate on whether to establish a Human Rights Act. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission backed such an act, but opponents--such as a former New South Wales Premier--feared it would give more power to unelected judges.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission was preparing a report entitled Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century. A similar report by HREOC in 1998 recommended the establishment of a Religious Freedom Act. Critics of the inquiry argued the Constitution and other laws already protect religious freedom, and that the inquiry's recommendations may seek to curtail some religious freedoms, such as the right of religious institutions to take beliefs and behavior into account in their hiring.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Several nongovernmental organizations promoted tolerance and better understanding among religious groups in the country. These groups included the Columbian Center for Christian-Muslim Relations, the National Council of Churches in Australia and its affiliated Aboriginal and Islander Commission, the Australian Council of Christians and Jews, and the Affinity Intercultural Foundation.

A University of Western Sydney study released in April 2009 found that 81 percent of Australians supported a right to dress according to Islamic custom. However, according to a report by the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Australia, African Muslim women and Muslims that wear hijabs experienced more racism than other Muslim women.

A Muslim woman complained to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission that an offer of employment was withdrawn after she requested three ten-minute prayer breaks per day. The company said it was unable to find a suitable location for her to conduct her prayers. The company agreed to pay the complainant compensation and provide her with a statement of regret.

There was graffiti sprayed on mosques in Newcastle in February 2009 and Rockingham, south of Perth, in April 2009.

An annual report on anti-Semitism written by the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council recorded 652 anti-Semitic incidents in the twelve-month period ending September 30, 2008. This was approximately twice the annual average of the previous 18 years and 2 percent higher than in 2007, the previous record year. According to the report's author, much of the anti-Semitic activity appeared to be a reaction to Israeli incursions into Lebanon and Gaza in 2008. Incidents involved violence, property damage, and threatening mail and telephone calls. The report also expressed concern about anti-Semitism on the Internet.

In May 2009, in Western Australia, state prosecutors filed charges against the perpetrator of an anti-Semitic rant recorded on Facebook under the anti-vilification statute. The case was before the courts at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2009 a federal court judge found a historian guilty of criminal contempt of court for continuing to publish material denying the Holocaust and vilifying Jews.

In April 2009 the Ambrose Centre for Religious Liberty was launched by prominent Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist leaders. One of the Centre's concerns is that the country's anti-vilification laws can be used against religious leaders who express views critical of other religions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

AUSTRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, religious minority groups complained about second-class status. The Government classifies some of these groups as "sects."

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Forum against Anti-Semitism reported 46 anti-Semitic incidents in 2008, including one physical attack. There was some societal mistrust and discrimination against members of some religious groups not officially recognized as "societies," particularly those referred to as "sects." During 2008 the public brought 47 cases of discrimination based on religion before the Equal Rights Commissioner. Muslims also reported prejudice, particularly with regard to headscarves and Islamic cemeteries. There was no marked deterioration in the atmosphere of religious tolerance during the reporting period.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 32,369 square miles and a population of 8.3 million. During previous reporting periods the country experienced some immigration from countries such as Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which increased the number of Muslims. The Muslim community more than doubled between 1991 and 2001 to 339,000, or 4.2 percent of the population. Estimates for 2008 indicate that there are approximately 400,000 Muslims in the country. Immigration has slowed down due to the gradual introduction of a quota system in the late 1990s.

According to the 2001 census, membership in major religious groups is as follows: Roman Catholic Church, 74 percent; Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches (Evangelical Church-Augsburger and Helvetic confessions), 4.7 percent; Muslim community, 4.2 percent; Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian,

and Bulgarian), 2.2 percent; other Christian churches, 0.9 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.3 percent; other non-Christian religious groups, 0.2 percent; and Jewish community, 0.1 percent. Atheists account for 12 percent, and 2 percent do not indicate a religious affiliation.

According to a poll by the German market research institute FESSEL-GfK conducted in June and July 2007, 81 percent of respondents stated that they belong to a church or religious group. Of that number, 2 percent attend services more than once a week, 10 percent attend weekly, 9 percent attend a minimum of once a month, 26 percent attend several times a year (on special occasions), and 53 percent rarely attend.

The provinces of Carinthia (10.3 percent) and Burgenland (13.3 percent) have higher percentages of Protestants than the national average of 4.7 percent.

A large number of immigrants come from the Balkans and Turkey, and these groups are largely Orthodox and Muslim respectively. The number of Muslims is higher than the national average of 4.2 percent in Vienna (7.8 percent) and the province of Vorarlberg (8.4 percent), where industry draws a disproportionately higher number of guest workers from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia.

The vast majority of groups considered "sects" by the Government are small organizations with fewer than one hundred members. Among the larger groups is the Church of Scientology, which claims between 5,000 and 7,000 members, and the Unification Church, with approximately 700 adherents. Other groups termed "sects" include Divine Light Mission, Eckankar, Hare Krishna, the Holosophic Community, the Osho Movement, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba, Sri Chinmoy, Transcendental Meditation, Center for Experimental Society Formation, Fiat Lux, Universal Life, and The Family.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, some religious minority groups complained about second-class status. The Government considers some of these groups to be "sects." Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom. One group that took its case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) over its treatment was the Jehovah's

Witnesses. After a history of government denial of its registration, the Church of Scientology did not seek recognition as a religious group.

The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against a church, religious society, or group because of its race, nationality, or ethnicity, if that incitement poses a danger to public order. It also prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against these groups if it violates human dignity.

The Government is secular. The Catholic Church is the predominant religious group. The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whitmonday, Corpus Christi Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception, Christmas Day, and Saint Stephen's Day.

The law does not restrict religious clothing or symbols in the public workplace. In November two Muslim teachers, one an active politician, received press attention for wearing their headscarves in the classroom.

The status of religious organizations is governed by the 1874 Law on Recognition of Churches and by the 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities, which establishes the status of "confessional communities." Religious organizations are divided into three legal categories (listed in descending order of status): officially recognized religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Each category of organizations possesses a distinct set of rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

Recognition as a religious society under the 1874 law has wide-ranging implications, such as the authority to participate in the mandatory church contributions program, provide religious instruction in public schools, and bring religious workers into the country to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers. Under the 1874 law, religious societies have "public corporation" status. This status permits them to engage in a number of public or quasi-public activities that are denied to confessional communities and associations. The Government provides religious societies but not other religious organizations with financial support for religious teachers at both public and private schools. The Government provides financial support to private schools run by any of the 14 officially recognized religious societies: the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches (Lutheran and Presbyterian, called "Augsburger" and "Helvetic" confessions), Islamic community, Old Catholic Church, Jewish community, Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), New Apostolic Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Methodist Church of Austria, Buddhist community, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, who received status as a recognized religious society on May 7, 2009.

The Alevis, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam while also drawing on the traditions of other religious groups found in Anatolia, have applied for recognition as a religious society. Their goal is to have separate religious instruction in public schools.

The 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities imposes new criteria on religious groups to achieve religious society status, although it allows previously recognized societies to retain their status. New criteria include a 20-year period of existence (at least 10 of which must be as a group organized as a confessional community under the 1998 law) and membership equaling at least 0.2 percent of the country's population (approximately 16,000 persons). Only five of the 14 recognized religious societies (Catholic, Protestant, Islamic Community, Eastern Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witnesses) meet this membership requirement. In past rulings, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) criticized the waiting period for recognition as well as the separate standards, benefits, and privileges applied to religious societies and other groups.

The 1998 law allows religious groups not recognized as societies to seek official status as "confessional communities" without the fiscal and educational privileges available to recognized religious groups. To apply, groups must have at least 300 members and submit to the Government their written statutes describing the goals, rights, and obligations of members, as well as membership regulations, officials, and financing. Groups also must submit a written version of their religious doctrine, which must differ from that of any religious society recognized under the 1874 law or any religious confessional community established under the 1998 law. The Ministry of Education then examines the doctrine to ensure that the group's basic beliefs do not violate public security, public order, health and morals, or the rights and freedoms of citizens. In 2005 several NGOs and recognized experts at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meeting on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance concluded that "the existing system and in particular the 1998 Law on Confessional Communities is inherently discriminatory as it de facto prevents religious organizations from obtaining a state-recognized status and relegates them to a second-class status."

Once the Government recognizes it, a religious confessional community has juridical standing, which permits it to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in its own name and contracting for goods and services. A religious group that seeks to obtain this new status is subject to a six-month waiting period from the time of application to the Ministry of Education and Culture. According to the Ministry, 14 groups applied for the status of religious confessional community, and 11 were granted the new status, with one, the Jehovah's Witnesses, moving from the status of confessional community to that of religious society in May 2009. In 1998 the Church of Scientology and the Hindu Mandir Association withdrew their applications. In 1999 the Hindu Mandir Association reapplied under the name Hindu Religious Community and was granted the new status. The Ministry rejected the application of the Sahaja Yoga group in 1998. Since then, its decision has been upheld in the Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court. Following a 2006 decree by the Ministry of Education, the ELAIA Christian Community (ELAIA Christengemeinde) also received status as a confessional community.

The 10 groups that constitute religious confessional communities according to the law are: the Baha'i Faith, Baptists, Evangelical Alliance, Movement for Religious Renewal--Community of Christians, Free Christian Community (Pentecostals), Pentecostal Community of God, ELAIA Christian Community, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindu Religious Community, and Mennonites. The Movement for Religious Renewal--Community of Christians applied for recognition as a religious society.

Religious groups that do not qualify for either religious society or religious confessional community status may apply to become associations under the Law of Associations. Associations have juridical standing and have many of the same rights as confessional communities, such as the right to own real estate within the parameters of the law on associations. Some groups have organized as associations even while applying for recognition as religious societies. The Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, and a number of smaller groups are organized as associations.

There are no restrictions on missionary activities. However, unrecognized religious groups reported some problems obtaining resident permits for foreign religious workers. Unlike workers for religious societies, religious workers for unrecognized groups apply for a general immigrant visa category that is neither employment, nor family-based, and subject to quota. Groups reported that changes enacted in 2006 made it more difficult to apply from abroad because the quotas

were exhausted by the time their applications arrived, while applying locally gave no better chance of success.

The Government provides funding for religious instruction in public schools and places of worship for children belonging to any of the 14 officially recognized religious societies. The Government does not offer such funding to other religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. In some cases, religious societies decide that the administrative cost of providing religious instruction is too great to warrant providing such courses in all schools. Attendance in religious instruction is mandatory for all students unless they formally withdraw at the beginning of the school year; students under the age of 14 require parental permission to withdraw from instruction. Instruction takes place either in the school or at sites organized by the religious groups. Some schools offer ethics classes for students not attending religious instruction.

The Government strictly enforces its anti-neo-Nazi legislation, which prohibits neo-Nazi acts, including Holocaust denial, incitement to neo-Nazi activity, and the glorification of National Socialism. Due to the country's history during the National Socialist era, there is strong opposition to relaxing the law banning Holocaust denial. Until March 2009 the country was the Chair of the 25-country Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and is one of the most active members in the group.

The Government provides police protection for Jewish community institutions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Several religious groups that the Government did not recognize under the 1998 law, as well as some religious law experts, dismissed the benefits of obtaining status under the 1998 law and complained that the law's additional criteria for recognition as a religious society obstructs recognition and formalizes a second-class status for religious groups not recognized as societies.

In March 2009 the Movement for Religious Renewal Community of Christians won a complaint against the Government regarding the waiting period for becoming a religious society with the ECHR.

On July 31, 2008, the ECHR ruled in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses in a case filed in 1998 challenging the 10-year waiting period required for achieving religious society status.

Three individual members of the Jehovah's Witnesses also filed cases with the ECHR involving the government's refusal to exempt ministers of Jehovah's Witnesses from both military and alternative service. In 2005 the ECHR ruled that two of these cases were admissible as possible violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, regarding religious freedom and discrimination. In 2006 the Jehovah's Witnesses filed an additional application with the ECHR in connection with the taxation of donations. On March 12 and 19, 2009, the ECHR decided the cases regarding the exemption from military and alternative service in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The State of Lower Austria and the City of Vienna fund a counseling center of the Society against Sect and Cult Dangers (GSK), a controversial quasi-NGO that actively works against sects and cults. GSK distributes information to schools and the general public and runs a counseling center for those who believe they have been negatively affected by cults or sects. Several states fund offices that provide information on sects and cults. Some members of the public believed the Office of Sect Issues and similar government offices fostered societal discrimination against unrecognized religious groups.

The Federal Office of Sect Issues continued to function as a counseling center for those who have questions about sects and cults. Under the law, this office has independent status, but the Minister for Health, Family, and Youth appoints and supervises its head.

The conservative People's Party (OVP) position regarding membership in a "sect" remained in force during the reporting period. The Party's stated position is that party membership is incompatible with membership in a "sect" if the sect holds a fundamentally different view of man from what the Party believes, advocates opinions irreconcilable with the ethical principles of the Party, or rejects the basic rights granted by progressively minded constitutional states and an open society.

Prisoners who belong to religious groups not recognized as societies are entitled to pastoral care. Some evangelical groups reported problems with accessing pastoral care in isolated instances; however, there were no allegations of widespread problems.

As in the previous reporting period, the Church of Scientology reported problems in obtaining concessions for staging public events in downtown Vienna.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Compulsory school curriculums provide for anti-bias and tolerance education as part of civics education and as a focus across various subjects, including history and German. Religious education and ethics classes were another forum for teaching the tenets of different religious groups and overall tolerance. Holocaust education was generally taught as part of history instruction but also was featured in other subjects under the heading "political education" (civics). The Ministry of Education conducts training projects with the Anti-Defamation League. Special teacher training seminars were available on the subject of Holocaust education, and Holocaust survivors talked to school classes about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The NGO Forum Against Anti-Semitism reported 46 anti-Semitic incidents in 2008, including one physical attack. The incidents also included name-calling, graffiti/defacement, threats, property damage, vilifying letters, and telephone calls. The European Union's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia declared in the past that anti-Semitism in the country was typically characterized by diffuse and traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes rather than by acts of physical aggression.

On May 9, 2009, five youths ages 14-16 wearing black masks and carrying fake machine guns chanted "Sieg Heil" and fired plastic pellets at participants in a ceremony commemorating the liberation of a concentration camp in Ebensee,

Upper Austria. The shots lightly injured two French visitors, one of whom was a Holocaust survivor. The youths were arrested; three were released under court surveillance.

On February 12, 2009, education authorities revoked the license of an Islamic instructor after he told his students to boycott companies he listed as "Jewish."

In February 2009 the outside wall of the Mauthausen concentration camp site was defaced with anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic graffiti.

In October 2008 a Vienna tram driver was fired because he had jokingly used the Nazi greeting "Sieg Heil" while driving a tram on October 25.

On July 20, 2008, three 18-20-year-old vandals sprayed swastikas and Nazi slogans on buildings and road signs in Bad St. Leonhard in Carinthia.

Muslims complained about incidents of societal discrimination and verbal harassment. Muslim women reported difficulties in the job market when potential employers learned they wore a headscarf. (In 2004 the Equal Treatment Bill that implemented the EU Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Guidelines took effect, allowing such victims to take action in court.) Women who wore a headscarf also reported that they experienced harassment in public areas. Two female schoolteachers who wore headscarves to work, one a Social Democrat politician, became the targets of far-right harassment after being featured on the cover of a magazine.

A controversy surrounding the expansion of a Turkish/Islamic center in Vienna remained unresolved. In the Lower Austrian town of Bad Voeslau, a new Turkish/Islamic mosque was scheduled to open in the first week of July 2009.

On May 5, 2009, government officials and religious leaders criticized the rightwing/populist Freedom Party (FPO) for its campaign slogan, "The West in Christian Hands." The slogan was part of the party's campaign for the European Parliament elections. Also in May, FPO leader Heinz-Christian Strache held up a crucifix while speaking at a protest against the planned expansion of a Turkish/Muslim center in Vienna, drawing a sharp rebuke from the country's Ecumenical Council.

In January 2009 the media reported the results of a study indicating that one-fifth of the country's Islamic religion teachers consider Islam and democracy to be

"incompatible." The Education Ministry and the Muslim Faith Community responded by reviewing the qualifications of religion teachers and the quality of textbooks. The Muslim Faith Community was also working on a new curriculum for religious instruction.

In September 2008 the Islamic Faith Community criticized the use of anti-Muslim themes such as warnings against the "threatening Islamization" or "Islam as the Fascism of the 21st century" in the September 28 general elections campaign. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment appeared to play a role in the gains of the far-right in the September elections.

On September 27-28, 2008, vandals sprayed 90 graves with Jewish symbols in the Muslim cemetery in Traun, Upper Austria.

Some societal mistrust and discrimination continued against members of some religious groups not recognized as societies, particularly against those considered to be members of sects. A large portion of the public perceived such groups as exploiting the vulnerable for monetary gain, recruiting and brainwashing youth, promoting antidemocratic ideologies, and denying the legitimacy of government authority. There were occasional television/radio shows and reports featuring alleged victims, or relatives and friends of victims, who claimed to be exploited by a group termed a "sect," or a Satanic or esoteric movement. During 2008 there were 47 cases of discrimination based on religion brought before the Equal Rights Commissioner.

Members of groups that the Government considers to be "sects" continued to complain that the Government lacks an objective stance when dealing with them. The "sects" claimed that the Government relies too heavily on isolated cases of persons who had negative experiences with a group, rather than speaking directly to the vast majority of members who make no complaint. Societal prejudice could also be a problem; a poll in 2006 found that 90 percent of citizens believed sects are "inherently dangerous."

Some groups complained about incidents in which instructors showed antisect videos in schools during religion or ethics instruction. One group complained about antisect material in a flyer directed toward senior citizens.

Relations among the 14 officially recognized religious societies are generally amicable. Fourteen Christian churches, among them the Catholic Church, various Protestant confessions, and eight Orthodox and Old Oriental churches, were

engaged in dialogue in the framework of the Ecumenical Council of Austrian Churches. The Baptists and the Salvation Army have observer status in the Council. The international Catholic organization Pro Oriente, which promotes dialogue with the Orthodox churches, was also active.

Although it can do so as a religious society, the Jehovah's Witnesses does not want to exercise the right to have religious instruction in schools and also does not want to engage in the government-sponsored church contribution program. It expects to benefit from the fact that its foreign religious workers can work in Austria and that contributions to the Jehovah's Witnesses are now tax deductible.

A new Islamic cemetery in Vienna opened in November 2008. At the end of the reporting period, construction continued on the new Islamic cemetery in Vorarlberg Province.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy monitors the Government's adherence to religious tolerance and freedom of expression as part of its evaluation of the Government's policies and commitments to freedom of expression. The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers regularly meet with religious and political leaders to reinforce the U.S. Government's commitment to religious freedom and tolerance and discuss the concerns of NGOs and religious communities regarding the Government's policies towards religious groups.

U.S. representatives repeatedly voiced concern to the Government about the strict requirements for religious recognition in the country.

The Embassy maintained an active dialogue with members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, and other religious groups.

The Embassy highlighted religious freedom and tolerance in its programs. In the reporting period, four Muslims participated in an International Visitor Program.

AZERBAIJAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. On March 18, 2009, however, a national referendum approved a series of amendments to the Constitution; two amendments limit the spreading of and propagandizing of religion. Additionally, on May 8, 2009, the Milli Majlis (Parliament) passed an amended Law on Freedom of Religion, signed by the President on May 29, 2009, which could result in additional restrictions to the system of registration for religious groups. In spite of these developments, the Government continued to respect the religious freedom of the majority of citizens, with some notable exceptions for members of religions considered nontraditional.

There was some deterioration in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. There were changes to the Constitution that undermined religious freedom. There were mosque closures, and state- and locally sponsored raids on evangelical Protestant religious groups. There were reports of monitoring by federal and local officials as well as harassment and detention of both Islamic and nontraditional Christian groups. There were reports of discrimination against worshippers based on their religious beliefs, largely conducted by local authorities who detained and questioned worshippers without any legal basis and confiscated religious material.

There were sporadic reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There was some prejudice against Muslims who converted to other faiths, and there was occasional hostility toward groups that proselytized, particularly evangelical Christians, and other missionary groups.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers conveyed concerns about the registration process and official attitudes toward "nontraditional" religious groups and expressed objections to the censorship of religious literature.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 33,774 square miles and a population of 8.2 million. There were no reliable statistics on membership in specific religious groups; however, according to official figures approximately 96 percent of the population

is Muslim. The remainder of the population consists mostly of Russian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, followers of other Christian groups, Jews, and nonbelievers.

Among the Muslim majority, religious observance is relatively low, and Muslim identity tends to be based more on culture and ethnicity than religion; however, there has been a gradual growth in the number of observant Muslims. According to the State Committee on Work with Religious Structures (SCWRS), the Muslim population is approximately 65 percent Shi'a and 35 percent Sunni; traditionally, differences are not defined sharply.

The majority of Christians are Russian Orthodox whose identity, like that of Muslims, tends to be based as much on culture and ethnicity as on religion. Christians are concentrated in Baku and several other urban areas.

The great majority of the Jewish population, numbering approximately 20,000, lives in Baku. Much smaller communities exist in Guba and elsewhere.

Shi'a, Sunni, Russian Orthodox, and Jews are considered to be the country's "traditional" religious groups. Small congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Molokans (Russian Orthodox Old Believers), Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is have been present for more than 100 years.

Since independence in 1991, a number of religious groups considered by the Government as foreign or "nontraditional" have established a presence, including "Wahhabi" and Salafist Muslims, Pentecostal and other evangelical Christians, including Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas. There are significant expatriate Christian communities in Baku.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides that persons of all faiths may choose and practice their religions without restriction. The law protects this right against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, based on a stated desire to limit the influence of extremist recruiters from foreign countries, the country approved by referendum on March 18, 2009 two amendments to the Constitution, which will have a direct impact on religion in the country. Article 18 Part 2 of the Constitution was changed to read: "Spreading of and propagandizing religion (religious movements), humiliating people's dignity, and contradicting the

principles of humanism are prohibited." A new section was added to Article 48, which is called Part 5 and reads, "No one shall be forced to express (to demonstrate) his or her religious faith and belief, to execute religious rituals and participate in religious ceremonies." Further to these amendments, on May 8, 2009, the Milli Majlis passed an amended Law on Religious Freedom, which, according to one Parliamentarian, was necessary to bring the law in compliance with the amendments to the Constitution; the President implemented the bill into law on May 29, 2009.

Even prior to the passing of the amended Law on Religious Freedom, there were numerous complaints of burdensome registration requirements, and selective harassment marred application of the law. The amended law has prompted the SCWRS to announce that all religious groups must reregister no later than January 2011 and that there will be additional requirements for registration. For its part, the SCWRS noted the refusal of an application is attributable to the religious community's failure to submit the legally required documents.

Under the Constitution, persons have the right to choose and change religious affiliation and beliefs (including atheism), join or establish the religious group of their choice, and practice religion, unless that practice requires sharing one's faith with other individuals. The law on religious freedom expressly prohibits the Government from interfering in the religious activities of any individual or group; however, there are exceptions, including cases where the activity of a religious group "threatens public order and stability."

A number of legal provisions enable the Government to regulate religious groups, including a requirement in the law on religious freedom that religious organizations, including individual congregations of a denomination, be registered by the Government. Registration enables a religious organization to maintain a bank account, rent property, and generally act as a legal entity. In practice, some groups were vulnerable to government raids for worshiping without registration. Religious groups must register with the SCWRS. The SCWRS has broad powers over registration and the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature. The SCWRS, for its part, however, maintains that it must first apply to the court system in order to suspend the activities of religious groups that it claims are violating the law. Religious groups are permitted to appeal registration denials to the courts. The groups also reserve the right to pursue legal consideration of their case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In such an instance, a group would have to exhaust its chances for consideration at every court level in the country before applying to the ECHR, which often takes several years.

According to the SCWRS, in 2008 it registered 103 religious communities, of which 101 were Islamic. According to the SCWRS, no religious community was denied registration. The total number of religious communities was 534 in 2008, including 502 Islamic and 32 non-Islamic. The SCWRS claimed to have discovered 160 nonregistered religious communities.

Registered Muslim organizations are subordinate to the Caucasian Muslim Board (CMB), a Soviet-era muftiate that appoints Muslim clerics to mosques, administers Islamic education institutions, periodically monitors sermons, and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca. Muslim religious groups must receive a letter of approval from the CMB before they can be registered by the SCWRS.

Under the law on religious freedom, political parties cannot engage in religious activity. Religious leaders may not simultaneously serve in public office and in positions of religious leadership, although this stipulation would not limit the right of a public official to worship. Religious facilities may not be used for political purposes.

Religious instruction is not mandatory, and there is no religious curriculum at privately funded or public elementary and high schools. Students can pursue religious courses at higher educational institutions. Those wishing to participate in state-supported training abroad for religious studies must obtain permission from, or register with, the SCWRS or the Ministry of Education. Otherwise, education abroad does not require preliminary permission of authorities.

Forum 18, a Norwegian NGO that reports on religious freedom, reported on January 5, 2009 and May 4, 2009 about the new "Religion Law" enacted by the de facto authorities in Azerbaijan's breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K), which has historically had a large Armenian majority. The Government of Azerbaijan has no ability to administer its authority in N-K. The "law" came into effect on January 9, 2009. Apparent restrictions include the requirement of 100 members for registration, banning of unregistered religious activity, the requirement for the de facto authorities to approve all religious literature, and proselytizing open only to the Armenian Apostolic Church, which the de facto authorities claim as the "official" church. On March 19, the Armenian Catholic Church became the first and only church registered thus far under the new "law." (The Armenian Apostolic Church does not have to register.) The U.S. embassy in Baku cannot confirm these reports, and neither can the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was some deterioration in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Restriction was seen in the form of property disputes, limitations on beards and hijabs, and an alleged ban on call to prayer in some areas.

The registration process consists of two steps: compilation of necessary documents and submission to the SCWRS. Numerous persons described this process as cumbersome, inefficient, and bureaucratic. Even functioning Islamic groups, operating with the approval of the CMB, were not properly registered; however, their standing with the CMB helped to mitigate scrutiny by the SCWRS in the absence of official registration. During the reporting period, several groups asserted that the SCWRS sometimes failed to rule on registration applications in a timely manner. In general, the registration process appears to serve as a point of leverage for the Government to use against religious groups it deems undesirable. Consequently, unregistered organizations, which choose to practice in the absence of official registration, are vulnerable to being declared illegal and closed or subject to selective harassment by local authorities; as a result, they found it difficult, or in some cases impossible, to function. From its perspective, the SCWRS claimed some religious communities failed to submit properly filed/developed registration documents, which served as the basis for declining registration.

According to a variety of Christian representatives, local or SCWRS officials selectively made the registration process difficult or impossible. Some Christian groups contended that when they appealed SCWRS denials of registration, local judges often were biased against Christian churches and were unlikely to rule in a just manner.

Authorities generally permitted expatriate members of Christian groups in Baku to worship freely, but some Christian communities encountered difficulties: For example, the Baptist churches in Neftchala and Aliabad (the latter has sought registration for approximately 15 years) were not able to obtain registration, with local notaries in Aliabad refusing to certify the Aliabad congregation's registration applications. The church in Neftchala failed to receive technical documentation from local authorities for the venue proposed as their church. According to the SCWRS, the church in Aliabad did not submit any appeal to the SCWRS. Regarding the church in Neftchala, the SCWRS maintained that the church failed

to submit documents in accordance with legislation; the registration appeal was declined with the SCWRS decree #79, dated February 26, 2002. The Cathedral of Praise Church had difficulties obtaining registration for its congregations in Ganja and Sumgayit due to the alleged lack of documents and technical mistakes in the application. The Assemblies of God community in Baku also had long-standing difficulties obtaining registration for its congregation. On April 9, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses, although registered in Baku, filed a new legal entity with the SCRWS for registration of a nationwide entity to allow them to be legally registered everywhere in the country.

A variety of unregistered religious groups continued to function, including Muslim groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and some evangelical Christians. However, some unregistered groups were subject to periodic and selective police harassment in the form of disruption of religious services and intimidation.

Forum 18 reported on May 4, 2009 that Revival Fire Evangelical Church in the breakaway region of N-K was denied registration, the first denial under the N-K de facto authorities' new "Religion Law." According to the "law," citizens are not free to share their faith, and in practice proselytizing was often discouraged. The "law" expressly prohibits religious proselytizing by foreigners, and the de facto authorities strictly enforced this. There was an allegation that foreigners were detained while participating in religious services of various denominations and accused of proselytizing. The detention did not result in prosecution. The de facto authorities were concerned about Islamic missionary groups (predominantly Iranian and Sunni Salafi) operating in the region and continued to restrict their activities.

In the rest of the country, local law enforcement officials occasionally monitored religious services and reportedly singled out some observant Christians and Muslims for searches. Local observers claimed local authorities routinely monitored certain mosques.

Forum 18 reported that the government-supported television station, ANS, showed film footage of the January 18, 2009 government raid on the Jehovah's Witnesses during a program on January 20, 2009.

In July 2008, there was a televised accusation against the Baptist leader, Ilya Zenchenko, accusing him of being an Armenian spy.

The ban on the call to prayer using loudspeakers from mosques continued to be enforced in Zagatala, according to reports, despite the May 2007 nationwide government reversal of a ban. The local ban was initiated in December 2007.

Controls on a variety of Islamic activity, including religious television broadcasts and sales of religious literature at metro stations, remained in effect, although the SCWRS contended that no such ban was in place.

The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of the SCWRS; however, authorities appeared to selectively restrict the import and distribution of religious materials. Obtaining permission to import religious literature remained burdensome, and Islamic and Christian groups complained of the lengthy process. During the reporting period, there were multiple episodes of police confiscating allegedly radical literature of both Islamic and non-Islamic religions in several areas of the country. The SCWRS noted all imported religious literature must pass the SCWRS's expert review to be allowed to enter the country as religious material, and that this process can be time-consuming given the volume of materials.

Jehovah's Witnesses in N-K also reported problems with literature confiscation. On August 7, 2008, a visiting Jehovah's Witness was engaged in public ministry when the de facto authorities arrested him, detained him for eight hours without offering food, and confiscated literature and personal belongings, some of which they refused to return. On July 20, 2008, 120 Jehovah's Witnesses, including children, the elderly, and the disabled, were returning to Stepanakert/Xankendi when N-K de facto authorities stopped them, searched for seven hours through all their possessions, and confiscated all literature except Bibles.

In the rest of the country, consistent with reports from previous periods, authorities prevented Muslims from wearing headscarves in passport photos and other official identity documents. Individuals are not forbidden from wearing headscarves in educational facilities or at state facilities, according to the law. However, in practice the Government did little to restrain university administrators or employers from selectively pressuring some women not to wear headscarves.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were sporadic violations of religious freedom, which included the destruction or closure of three mosques. In many instances, authorities directed abuse toward those Muslims who adopted Salafist Islamic practices or toward

those Christians who had converted, reflecting the popular prejudice toward ethnic Azeris who convert to "nontraditional" religious groups such as evangelical Christian denominations. The SCWRS claimed that it only intervenes in cases of forced religious activities, and that the Government does not exert pressure on Islamic communities.

The NGO Eurasianet.org asserted on May 27, 2009 that a number of mosques had been closed in several Baku neighborhoods during the past month; however, the mosque at Baku State University, Ilahiyyat, was open at the end of the reporting period. The Turkish Embassy reported that Shahidlyar Mosque, built with Turkish support, was closed for repairs. On May 11, 2009, authorities closed down a mosque located on an offshore drilling settlement, the Oily Rocks, for alleged safety reasons.

On April 26, 2009, police destroyed the Prophet Muhammad Mosque of the Yasamal District Religious Community. The Yasamal District Religious Community (a Muslim organization) started construction of a community mosque in the summer of 2005, having acquired necessary administrative permissions from the district authorities as well as from the SCWRS and the CMB. In October 2008, the district executive authority responsible for administration of the Yasamal region claimed the construction of the mosque was illegal and ordered a halt to construction; by this time, the main building of the mosque had already been completed. In addition, local authorities filed a lawsuit against the owner of the property, which the local court upheld. The community filed a countersuit and submitted it to the Court of Appeals. Nonetheless, authorities arrived at the mosque on March 30, 2009 and destroyed some of the ornaments on the mosque as well as the fence between the construction zone and the street. Finally, on April 26 and 27, 2009, the Yasamal District authorities destroyed the mosque. The motivations of the authorities who destroyed the mosque were unclear, and the Baku mayor's office referred the Embassy to the district executive authority. However, some local observers believe that the motivation behind the destruction was acquisition of the land for commercial use; there was no indication the mosque was targeted for ideological purposes. For its part, the SCWRS claimed the community was not acting in accordance with decisions of relevant authorities.

In April 2009, the Court of Appeals of Baku dismissed the case of the Cathedral of Praise (Word of Life) Protestant Community, which was mired in a property dispute that limited the capacity for worshipers to congregate freely. In spite of an apparently legal purchase of land, on which a church was being erected, the land was confiscated as a result of a suit filed by an oil refinery, Azerneftiyag. Although

the community purchased the land in a legal manner from a businessman who had acquired it from the refinery in the 1990s, the refinery claimed the businessman's acquisition of the land was illegal, thereby negating the community's purchase of the land. The refinery raised the case with the Khatai District Court, whose verdict allowed for the confiscation of 492 square feet (150 square meters) of property from the church. The community demanded fair compensation for the confiscated land, as it had already constructed a church building and conducted renovation and furnishing. The community's countersuit was refused on the first attempt. In September 2008, the district court confiscated an additional 492 square feet (150 square meters) of property.

Particularly in regions outside of Baku, members of the Cathedral of Praise community reported incidents of harassment by local authorities, to include illegal entries into private homes by authorities, detention and questioning without cause, and confiscation of religious materials.

In March 2009, authorities released the Baptist pastor from Aliabad, Hamid Shabanov, who was arrested in June 2008 for allegedly possessing an illegal weapon. Shabanov was released to house arrest in November 2008. Local Baptists claimed local authorities planted the weapon in Shabanov's residence. The community filed a lawsuit for full rehabilitation of Shabanov and submitted it to the Court of Appeals.

In March 2009, the Agdash District police and the Agdash District Ministry of National Security, a television crew, and a representative from the SCRWS, raided a Baptist gathering of 12 children -- present with their parents' permission to hear Bible stories -- and several adults in the town of Agdash in central Azerbaijan. The police removed the children to a separate room, and the police, a member of SCRWS, and a teacher took their names and questioned them without their lawyers or parents present. The authorities took the adults to the police station and fined them \$12 (10 manat) for illegally teaching children to spread Christianity. The adults complained they were forced to pay in cash because the banks were closed because of the Navruz holiday and they were not given any receipt. The raid was widely shown on television stations, and the names and addresses of the adults detained were provided. For its part, the SCWRS claimed the event was disrupted because of illegal conduct while having foreigners and underage children present.

The community of Jehovah's Witnesses reported a number of raids and disruptions of their gatherings during the reporting period. On April 9, 2009, the Memorial of the Death of Jesus Christ, the most important religious event of the year for

Jehovah's Witnesses, authorities again raided a Jehovah's Witnesses' religious service in Ganja, ending the service and preventing the second service from taking place. Authorities took some members of the group to the police station and kept them for five hours, accusing the group of violating Article 299 of the Administrative Violations Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan on "Establishment and violation of regulations of religious organizations (structures)." The police hit one person in the group, according to eyewitnesses. Disruptions and police raids also took place while the community members gathered in the Baku area in January and February 2009 as well as in November 2008. The official explanation was again violation of Article 299 of the Administrative Code.

On January 18, 2009, during a disruption of a gathering in Ganja, police detained nine persons and declared the gathering illegal due to absence of registration of the community for gatherings outside Baku city, citing Article 299.

On September 6, 2008, in Mingachevir, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that police from the Ministry of National Security disrupted a meeting of 21 members and without warrants searched the apartment, insulted and videotaped those present, threatened to show the videotape on television, and took away their literature. Police detained four women, the homeowner, and a couple with a child, questioned them, and pressured them to accept Islam. Then police took them to a judicial hall, fined them \$13 (manat 10), and requested they transfer money into a police account. When authorities denied them access to their lawyers or written documentation, the Jehovah's Witnesses refused to testify and refused to sign papers, calling the hearing illegal. The police released them but confiscated their literature.

The SCWRS claimed gatherings of Jehovah's Witnesses were disrupted only in the case of violations of the law. The SCWRS claimed the community repeatedly attempted to hold religious gatherings outside of registered locations in spite of numerous warnings that went unheeded.

Domestic human rights monitors criticized the government's failure to develop a civilian alternative military service option, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses argued that the country, as a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights, was obliged to develop a civilian alternative military service option. Government officials reportedly criticized the group's position on military service as "defeatist" and "contradicting public morality" because of the unresolved conflict over N-K.

Forum 18 reported that Georgian Orthodox churches in ethnic Georgian villages near the Georgia border in Kurmukh in the Kakh District were open for only two services twice a year. Authorities say they are historical monuments and closed them in 2007, despite the reported willingness of the congregations to restore them.

At the end of the reporting period, the 19 madrassahs or Qur'anic courses, which authorities closed to review curriculum in late 2007, remained closed.

During the reporting period, there were multiple reports of authorities detaining alleged Islamic radicals, shaving their beards, seizing weapons, and banning Islamic literature. Local commentators reported Salafists were particularly active in the northern regions of Zaqatala, Guba, and Kachmaz, but they criticized the Government for often failing to distinguish between extremists and observant Muslims.

The Abu Bakr Mosque remained closed by the Government, in spite of the community's repeated calls for the mosque to be reopened and repeated court challenges. On August 17, 2008, an explosion at Baku's Abu Bakr Mosque killed two and wounded 11 people, including the head of the religious community, who has since recovered. Immediately after the incident, government authorities closed the mosque, which served an average Friday attendance of 7,000 worshipers, pending an investigation into the event, and enforced a nationwide ban on worshipers meeting outside mosques. Authorities later announced the attack was conducted by the radical group of so-called Forest Brothers, whose leader, Ilgar Mollachiyev, was reportedly killed in Dagestan, Russia by Russian federal authorities in September 2008. Despite several lawsuits and court appeals, the mosque remained closed during what the Government called an ongoing investigation. For its part, the SCWRS deferred to the security organs of the Government for responses to the Abu Bakr Mosque closure, but it also declared that the community was never properly registered. Additionally, the SCWRS said worshippers of the Abu Bakr mosque were free to worship at other registered communities in Azerbaijan.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government actively promoted religious tolerance. The SCWRS convened leaders of various religious communities on several occasions. During the year, the SCWRS organized several seminars, conferences, and regional meetings on religious freedom and tolerance.

The Fifth Islamic Conference of Cultural Ministers held in Tripoli in November 2007 proclaimed Baku the Islamic Cultural Capital for 2009. This bolstered renovation of a number of mosques throughout the city and Absheron Peninsula.

The Juma Mosque was reopened; however, the CMB assigned it a new akhund, Haji Surkhay Mammadov.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There was popular prejudice against Muslim citizens who converted to other faiths and hostility toward groups that proselytized, particularly evangelical Christian, and other missionary groups. This was accentuated by the unresolved conflict over N-K.

Hostility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, intensified by the N-K conflict, remained strong. In those areas of the country controlled by ethnic Armenian separatists, all ethnic Azeris have fled, and the mosques that were not destroyed remained inactive. Animosity toward ethnic Armenians elsewhere in the country forced most of them to depart between 1988 and 1990, and all Armenian churches, many of which were damaged in ethnic riots that took place more than a decade ago, remained closed. As a consequence, the estimated 10,000 to 30,000 ethnic Armenians who remained were unable to attend services in their traditional places of worship.

As in previous reporting periods, newspapers and television broadcasts depicted "nontraditional" religious groups as threats to the identity of the country and as undermining the country's traditions of interfaith harmony, which led to local harassment. For example, on March 25, 2009, Forum 18 reported that television crews along with authorities raided a Baptist meeting in Agdash.

During the reporting period, articles critical of Salafism and of Christian missionaries appeared in newspapers. In general, society was negatively predisposed to foreign (mostly Iranian and Salafist) Muslim missionary activity,

which many viewed as an attempt to spread political Islam and therefore a threat to stability and peace. The media targeted some Muslim communities the Government claimed were involved in illegal activities.

In contrast with reports prior to 2008, there were no reported cases of anti-Semitic incidents.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. embassy officers conveyed concerns about the registration process and official attitudes toward "nontraditional" religious groups to the SCWRS, as well as concerns about harassment of observant Muslims. The embassy also expressed concern regarding the degree of official commitment to religious freedom in discussions with the Government and in the press.

In addition, on November 21-22, 2008, the U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Countries visited the country and met with government and religious leaders about the role of Islam in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan's role in the greater Islamic community.

The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officers maintained close contact with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders and regularly met with members of unregistered religious groups to monitor religious freedom. Embassy officers also maintained close contact with nongovernmental organizations that addressed matters of religious freedom.

BAHAMAS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 13,939 square miles and a population of 342,400, including those residing illegally. The country is ethnically diverse and includes a Haitian minority of legal and illegal immigrants estimated at 30,000 to 60,000 persons and a white/European minority of comparable size.

More than 90 percent of the population professes a religion, and anecdotal evidence suggests that most attend services regularly. The country's religious profile reflects its diversity. Protestant Christian denominations including Baptists (35 percent), Anglicans (15 percent), Pentecostals (8 percent), Church of God (5 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (5 percent), and Methodists (4 percent) are in the majority, but there are also significant Roman Catholic (14 percent) and Greek Orthodox populations. Smaller Jewish, Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslim communities also are active. A small number of Bahamians and Haitians, particularly those living in the Family Islands, practice Obeah, a version of voodoo. A small number of citizens identify themselves as Rastafarians, while some members of the small resident Guyanese and Indian populations practice Hinduism and other South Asian religions. Although many unaffiliated Protestant congregations are almost exclusively black, most mainstream churches are integrated racially.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Constitution specifically forbids infringement of a person's freedom to choose and change his or her religion and guarantees the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The law provides effective remedies to enforce these rights.

Christianity is the dominant religion. Political and public discourse often refers to the country's strong Christian heritage and Christian themes in general, and the Constitution requires the Government to guarantee respect for Christian values.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas Day as national holidays. The Government meets regularly with religious leaders, both publicly and privately, to discuss social, political, and economic issues.

Churches and other religious congregations do not face any special registration requirements, although they must incorporate legally to purchase land. There are no legal provisions to encourage or discourage the formation of religious communities, which are required to pay the same tariffs and stamp taxes as for-profit companies if they legally incorporate.

Religion is recognized as an academic subject at government schools and is included in mandatory standardized achievement and certificate tests. The country's Christian heritage has a heavy influence on religion classes in government-supported schools, which focus on the study of Christian philosophy, Biblical texts, and, to a lesser extent, comparative and non-Christian religions presented in a Christian context. The Constitution allows students, or their guardians in the case of minors, to decline to participate in religious education and observance in schools; this right, although rarely exercised, was respected in practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Haitian immigrants brought with them elements of voodoo. The practice of Obeah is illegal, and those caught practicing it or attempting to intimidate, steal, inflict disease, or restore a person to health under the guise of Obeah are liable to three months of imprisonment.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Several interdenominational organizations and ecumenical movements freely and energetically expressed their opinions on social, political, and economic issues. Christian pastors exerted significant influence over politics and society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Article 22 of the Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings, in accordance with the customs observed in the country. However, the Government placed some limitations on the exercise of these rights.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period; however, the Government continued to exert a level of control over Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Outcries against government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims in certain fields continued. Members of other religious groups who practiced their faith privately did so without interference from the Government.

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, there were some reports of Sunni-Shi'a tensions.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 231 square miles and a population of 1.05 million. The population is 99 percent Muslim; Jews, Christians, Hindus, and Baha'is constitute the remaining 1 percent. Muslims belong to the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, with Shi'a constituting between 60 and 70 percent of the citizen Muslim population.

Foreigners, mostly from South Asia and from other Arab countries, constitute an estimated 49 percent of the population. Approximately half of resident foreigners are non-Muslim, including Christians (primarily Roman Catholic, Protestant, Syrian Orthodox, and Mar Thoma from South India), Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

Much of the tension between Shi'a and Sunni Bahrainis stems from social and economic factors. Shi'a Muslims comprise the majority of the poor citizen

population, and have a higher unemployment rate than Sunni Muslims, although many exceptions can be found, especially in several Shi'a merchant and scholarly families, and in older Sunni areas. Historically, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims lived in geographically separate villages, however intermingling between the sects has increased. Because of the Shi'a's generally lower socio-economic status, and the lower quality of government schools as compared to private schools, less wealthy Shi'a Muslims have less access to international-quality college- and graduate-level education.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, there were limits on this right.

The Constitution imposes no restrictions on the right to choose, change, or practice one's religion of choice, including the study, discussion, and promulgation of those beliefs. The Government observed and enforced these provisions. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion or creed, including by private actors; however there is no further law to prevent discrimination, nor is there a procedure to file a grievance.

Shari'a law governs personal status and a person's rights can vary according to Shi'a or Sunni interpretation, as determined by the individual's faith or by the courts. Both Shi'a and Sunni women have the right to petition for a divorce. Religious courts grant the request in most cases but are not obligated to. Women of either branch of Islam may own and inherit property and may represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, a Shi'a woman may inherit all property. By contrast, in the absence of a direct male heir, a Sunni woman inherits only a portion as governed by Sunni interpretations of Shari'a; the balance is divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased. A Muslim woman may legally marry only a Muslim man. Non-Muslim men often convert in connection with a planned marriage to a Muslim woman. The Constitution states that Islam is the state religion. The law gives the Government the authority to monitor sermons and prosecute clerics for inciting sectarianism or violence, but the Government did not prosecute any preachers for incitement during the reporting period.

The law prohibits anti-Islamic writings but imposes no other restrictions on religious expression or speech.

The Constitution states that Shari'a is a principal source for legislation. The civil and criminal legal systems consist of a complex mix of courts based on diverse legal sources, including Sunni and Shi'a Shari'a, tribal law, and other civil codes and regulations. Shi'a Shari'a judges were slightly more numerous than their Sunni counterparts. The Constitution provides for women's political rights. Shari'a law governs personal status.

The Government observes the following Islamic holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, and Ashura.

The Government allows religion-based, political NGOs to register as political "societies," which operate as parties with the legal authority to conduct political activities.

The law allows for religious publications and other religious media. The law does not restrict the distribution of religious media in general, so long as that media is not anti-Islamic. The law does not prohibit, restrict, or punish the importation, possession, or distribution of religious literature, clothing, or symbols. The law does not impose a religious dress code.

A senior Shi'a cleric meets, makes public statements, and interacts directly with senior Government officials, but did not register. The Government did not attempt to force the group to register.

Islamic studies are a part of the curricula in government schools and are mandatory for all public school students. The Maliki school of Sunni jurisprudence forms the basis for the decade-old curricula, which does not include the Ja'afari traditions of Shi'a Islam.

The Government does not designate religion or sect on national identity documents. While the birth certificate application records the child's religion, it does not record the sect. The actual birth certificate does not include this information.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, the Government placed limits on this right and continued to monitor and exert limited control over Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religious groups practiced their faith without interference from the Government. These groups maintained their own places of worship and displayed the symbols of their religion, including crosses and statues of deities and saints.

Several Christian congregations remained unregistered. On May 14, 2009, the Ministry of Social Development ordered six congregations, which it had instructed to register in January 2008 following neighbors' complaints about parking, to close down on May 14, 2009, after denying their registration applications. The Ministry denied registration to 10 other congregations that applied for registration.

Members of the Baha'i community reported they have not sought official recognition from the Government; however, the group maintained a functioning cemetery on land donated by the Government, as well as a Baha'i center they established in 1963, and land for a future Baha'i temple.

The Government funded, monitored, and closely controlled all official religious institutions, including Shi'a and Sunni mosques, Shi'a ma'tams (religious community centers), Shi'a and Sunni awqaf (religious endowments), and the religious courts, which represented both the Ja'afari (Shi'a) and Maliki (Sunni) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs reviewed and approved all clerical appointments within both the Sunni and Shi'a communities. The Government rarely interfered with what it considered legitimate religious observances. The Government permitted public religious events, most notably the large annual commemorative marches by Shi'a Muslims during the Islamic months of Ramadan and Muharram, but police closely monitored such events during the reporting period.

The Government did not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising their children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of the parents' choice. The Government did not require individuals to practice or affiliate with any religion. Noncitizens and immigrants faced no governmental difficulties in practicing their faiths.

Local bookstores displayed and sold Bibles and other Christian publications in addition to Islamic and other religious literature. Churches also sold Christian materials, including books, music, and messages from Christian leaders, openly and without restriction. Religious tracts of all branches of Islam, cassettes of

sermons delivered by Muslim preachers from other countries, and publications of other religious groups were readily available. The Government authorized the publication and public discussion of a book by a Bahraini citizen on the Baha'i community in the country. On January 18, 2009 the Ministry of Culture and Information Affairs ordered the blocking of websites that incited sectarianism, and those that it deemed anti-Islamic or pornographic.

There were no reports that the Government monitored other minority religions. The Government attempted to restrain speeches and materials that fostered intolerance or hatred toward any particular religion or religious figures.

Shi'a were underrepresented in the Ministry of Education in both the leadership and in the ranks of head teachers who teach Islamic studies and supervise and mentor other teachers. At the secondary school level, out of more than a dozen Islamic studies head teachers, only two were Shi'a. Although there were many Islamic studies teachers who were Shi'a, school authorities discouraged them from introducing content about Shi'a traditions and practices and instructed them to follow the curriculum.

The Ministry of Information continued to ignore requests by the government-run TV station to broadcast Friday sermons live from Shi'a mosques, as it did from Sunni mosques.

The Government did not prevent or punish the importation, possession, or distribution of religious literature, clothing, or symbols.

The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs maintains program oversight on all citizens studying religion abroad. There were no restrictions on the number of citizens permitted to make pilgrimages to Shi'a shrines and holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Government monitored travel to Iran and scrutinized carefully those who chose to pursue religious study there.

The Government did not punish links with coreligionists in other countries, although some officials expressed concern about Iran's influence on the Shi'a population. The Government did not require employees to take any kind of religious oath or practice elements of a particular faith, nor did it prevent them from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith.

Although there were exceptions, the Sunni Muslim citizen minority enjoyed favored status. Sunni citizens often received preference for employment in

sensitive government positions, in the managerial ranks of the civil service, and in the military. Only a few Shi'a citizens held significant posts in the defense and internal security forces, although more were found in the enlisted ranks. The police force reported it did not record or consider religious belief when hiring employees, although Shi'a continued to allege they were unable to obtain government positions, especially in the security services, because of their sect. Shi'a were employed in some branches of the police, such as the Community Police and the Traffic Police, and, in at least one instance, were permitted to bear arms.

Curricula specialists in the Islamic Studies Department at the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Directorate were all Sunni. The Curriculum Directorate formed a separate committee of Shi'a teachers and clerics, along with members of the Curriculum Directorate, to develop the Islamic studies curriculum for the Ja'afari Institute, which is the only publicly funded institution in which teachers can legally discuss Shi'a beliefs and traditions. There were five registered Ja'afari Hawzas (Shi'a religious schools), and five registered Sunni religious schools.

There were 723 Shi'a mosques and 339 Sunni mosques registered with the Government. The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (MOJIA), the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, and the Royal Court provided Dinar 11,160,274 (\$29,574,726.10) to fund 27 religious projects for Shi'a and 19 projects for Sunnis across the country. In newer developments, such as Hamad Town and Isa Town, which often have mixed Sunni and Shi'a populations, there tended to be a disproportionate number of Sunni mosques. In Hamad Town, where the population was estimated to be more than 50 percent Shi'a, there were 22 Sunni mosques and five Sunni grand mosques, but only 10 Shi'a mosques and only one Shi'a grand mosque, although a second one is near completion. This represents an increase of one Sunni mosque, five Shi'a mosques, and one Shi'a grand mosque from 2008. MOJIA approved an application for the Shi'a community to establish a ma'tam in Hamad Town; however, the land allocated was far from the rest of the community. As an alternative, Shi'a have converted parts of their homes into ma'tams. The Government provided land and funds to establish the Sunni Hamad Town Charity Fund, but no land was similarly granted to the Shi'a community, which had rented an existing building for the offices of the Shi'a Charity Fund.

Every religious group must obtain a license from the MOJIA operate. A religious group may also need approval from the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Information, and/or the Ministry of Education for some activities, such as opening a school. Christian congregations with current Ministry of Social

Development registration operated freely and could offer their facilities to other Christian congregations that did not have their own places of worship. Four Sikh temples, several Hindu temples, and a Hindu crematorium function freely. The Hindu temple dedicated to Krishna has existed in Manama for over 150 years. While the Jewish community's only synagogue has been closed since 1948, the Jewish cemetery is operational. Holding a religious meeting without a permit is illegal; however, there were no reports of the Government denying religious groups a permit to gather during the reporting period. There are several unregistered Christian congregations.

In divorce cases, the courts routinely granted Shi'a and Sunni women custody of children until an age at which custody reverts to the father based on Ja'afari and Maliki Islamic law, respectively. In all circumstances except mental incapacitation, the father, regardless of custody decisions, retains the right to make certain legal decisions for his children, such as guardianship of any property belonging to the child, until the child reaches legal age. A noncitizen woman automatically loses custody of her children if she divorces their citizen father.

On January 13, 2009, the Government proposed a law to standardize personal status rulings for both Sunni and Shi'a courts. In response to Shi'a opposition to the proposed Ja'afari portion, the Government withdrew the combined draft and submitted only the Sunni-Maliki portion. On May 27, 2009, the King ratified the Sunni-Maliki portion of the law.

Civil courts use non-Muslims' faith to determine their personal status in regard to marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On January 4, MOJIA registered a Baha'i marriage as a civil marriage, not as Islamic.

During the reporting period, the Government allowed members of the Awali Community Church to visit Christian prison inmates monthly to provide clothing and Christian literature. Members of other churches also made periodic visits to Christian inmates.

The Ministry of Education worked with MOJIA to develop a new religious education curriculum to cover the five principal schools of Islamic jurisprudence and practices. The new curriculum contains content opposing extremism and, at the end of the reporting period, was pending government approval before being sent to Parliament for legislative approval.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Regional Sunni-Shi'a tensions had an impact on intra-Muslim relations. In general the Sunni Muslim minority enjoyed favored status. The private sector tended to hire Shi'a in lower paid, less skilled jobs. Educational, social, and municipal services in most Shi'a neighborhoods were inferior to those found in Sunni communities.

Converts to Islam from other religious groups were not uncommon, especially in cases of marriage between Muslim men and non-Muslim women. These converts were normally welcomed into the Muslim community. On the other hand, society traditionally does not tolerate converts from Islam to other religious groups. There were reports that families and communities often shunned these individuals and sometimes subjected converts to physical abuse. Some of these converts believed it necessary to leave the country permanently.

On March 7, 2009, Shi'a rioters threw Molotov cocktails at a Pakistani Sunni's truck as he drove past their village. The man died on March 21 from burns suffered in the attack. On April 11, the King granted amnesty to 178 individuals accused of security-related crimes, such as rioting, theft of a police weapon, arson, and assault on a police vehicle. Nearly all of those included in the pardon were Shi'a. Criminal charges were suspended against 27 Shi'a youth suspected in the March 7 Molotov attack and the April 2008 death of a Pakistani Sunni police officer, but they remained in custody pending an agreement on compensation for the next-of-kin. Problems continued, stemming primarily from the Government's perceived unequal treatment of Shi'a in the country and from street violence advocated by some Shi'a radicals.

The Islamic Enlightenment Society, a Shi'a group, held its annual conference in March 2009 with the announced aim of diffusing tension between Muslim sects. The society invited national Sunni and Shi'a scholars to participate. Bahraini independent Salafi (Sunni) religious scholars Sheikh Salah Al-Jowder and Sheikh Rashid Al Muraikhi, and Shi'a clerics Sheikh Isa Qasim and Abdulla Al Ghoraifi spoke about the importance of sectarian cooperation. Throughout the year, the society invited Sunni and Shi'a scholars from outside the country to participate in seminars and to speak about increased Islamic unity and awareness. Some Sunni scholars accepted these invitations.

The Hindu temple to Krishna allowed Hindus devoted to other deities and Sikhs to use its facilities for their religious rites throughout the year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

U.S. government officials continued to meet regularly with representatives of human rights NGOs to discuss matters of religious freedom among other human rights-related topics. Regular meetings with human rights activists reaffirmed the U.S. government's commitment to religious freedom and other human rights-related matters.

To foster better relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the United States again sponsored the Ramadan visit of a prominent American imam; in 2008 it was Imam Bashar Arafat, President of Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation. He met with clerics, government officials, NGOs, students, and members of the public. He delivered public addresses, moderated roundtable discussions, and gave interviews on interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance. Imam Arafat also led prayers at the country's preeminent mosque.

BANGLADESH

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. It provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate all religions, subject to law, public order, and morality. It also states that every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain, and manage its religious institutions. Although the Government publicly supported freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem during the reporting period. There were no reported demonstrations or attempts to attack institutions of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, but there were isolated instances of harassment. Demands that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims continued sporadically, but the Government generally acted in an effective manner to protect Ahmadis and their property. Religion exerted a significant influence on politics, and the Government was sensitive to the religious sentiments of most citizens.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. On December 29, 2008, the Awami League (AL), an avowedly secular party that enjoys broad support from religious minorities, won power in the first parliamentary elections since 2001. These elections were largely free of the violence and intimidation against religious minorities that had characterized earlier ones. The new Government appointed members of minority communities to several senior leadership positions. The Government initiated efforts to reform the curriculum of Islamic religious schools, known as madrassahs, to standardize education. Citizens generally were free to practice the religion of their choice. Government officials, including police, nonetheless often were ineffective in upholding law and order and sometimes were slow to assist religious minority victims of harassment and violence. The Government and many civil society leaders stated that violence against religious minorities normally had political or economic dimensions and could not be attributed solely to religious belief or affiliation.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the period covered by this report, although figures suggested such incidents declined significantly in comparison to the previous reporting period. Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence from the Muslim majority. Harassment of Ahmadis continued.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In meetings with officials and in public statements, U.S. Embassy officers encouraged the Government to protect the rights of minorities. Publicly and privately, the Embassy denounced acts of religious intolerance and called on the Government to ensure due process for all citizens. The Ambassador met with minority religious communities around the country, including a visit to the country's most prominent Hindu temple just days before the national election and a visit to a predominantly Hindu polling station during the election. The U.S. Government sponsored the highly successful visit of a prominent U.S. Muslim cleric who spoke to audiences about Qur'anic interpretations that support tolerance and gender equity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 55,126 square miles and a population of 154 million. According to the 2001 census, Sunni Muslims constitute 90 percent of the population and Hindus 9 percent. The rest of the population is mainly Christian, mostly Roman Catholic, and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists are predominantly found among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bengali and ethnic minority Christians live in communities across the country, including Barisal City, Gournadi in Barisal District, Baniarchar in Gopalganj, Monipuripara in Dhaka, Christianpara in Mohakhal, Nagori in Gazipur, and Khulna City. There also are small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers varied from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents per group. There is no indigenous Jewish community and no significant immigrant Jewish population. Religion is an important part of community and cultural identity for citizens, including those who did not participate actively in prayers or services.

Most foreign residents are of Bangladeshi origin and practice Islam. Separately, there are approximately 30,000 registered Rohingya refugees and 200,000 to 500,000 unregistered Rohingyas practicing Islam in the southeast around Cox's Bazar.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice, profess, and propagate any religion, subject to law, public order, and morality. There are no laws against blasphemy, although religious political parties have pledged to enact such laws should they gain power. Since coming into power, the new Government has not publicly commented on this issue.

The Government publicly supported freedom of religion; however, attacks and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities continued during the reporting period. In general, government institutions and the courts protected religious freedom.

On December 29, 2008, the Awami League (AL), led by Sheikh Hasina Wazed, won 230 of 299 parliamentary seats in elections that international and domestic observers considered generally free and fair. The elections and the peaceful transfer of power that followed ended two years of rule by an unelected Caretaker Government.

The Government ran training academies for imams (Islamic clergy) and proclaimed Islamic festival days but generally did not dictate sermon content or select or pay clergy. However, the Government has the authority to appoint or remove imams and exercises a degree of indirect influence over sermon content in government mosques, including the national mosque, Baitul Mukarram. The Government monitored the content of religious education in Islamic religious schools, or madrassahs, and announced its intention to make changes to the curriculum, including modernizing and mainstreaming the content of religious education.

Shari'a played an influential role in civil matters pertaining to the Muslim community; however, there is no formal implementation of Shari'a and it is not imposed on non-Muslims. For instance, alternative dispute resolution was available to individuals for settling family arguments and other civil matters not related to land ownership. With the consent of both parties, arbitrators relied on principles found in Shari'a for settling disputes. In addition, Muslim family law was loosely based on Shari'a.

In 2001 the High Court ruled all legal rulings based on Shari'a known as fatwas, to be illegal. However, the ban was not implemented because a group of Islamic clerics filed an appeal, which remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

Although Islamic tradition dictates that only muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa, village religious leaders at times made declarations in individual cases. Sometimes this resulted in extrajudicial punishments, often against women, for perceived moral transgressions.

The Constitution guarantees the right to propagate the religion of one's choice; however, local authorities and communities often objected to efforts to convert persons from Islam.

Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differed slightly depending on the religious beliefs of the persons involved. Each religious group has its own family laws. For example, Muslim men may marry as many as four wives; however, a Muslim man must get his first wife's signed permission before marrying an additional woman. Society strongly discourages polygamy, and it is rarely practiced. In contrast, a Christian man could marry only one woman. Under Hindu law unlimited polygamy is permitted, and although there is no provision for divorce and legal separation, Hindu widows could legally remarry. The family law of the religion of the two parties concerned governs marriage rituals and proceedings; however, marriages also are registered with the state. There are no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different religious groups.

On March 8, 2008, the head of the Caretaker Government announced a women's development policy, triggering violent protests from some Islamist groups that argued the policy sought to give men and women equal inheritance rights that would contravene principles in Shari'a and Muslim family law. Key features of the policy included reserving one-third of parliamentary seats for women and their direct election, as well as new laws to ensure equal opportunity of women in terms of control of their earned property. Although government advisers (ministers) publicly refuted the claim, the Government formed a committee of Islamic scholars to review the policy. The committee, headed by the top religious leader at the national mosque, recommended a set of changes to the policy. Although the Caretaker Government thereafter was silent on the issue, government officials privately reported that implementation of elements of the women's development policy had occurred through other mechanisms, such as the poverty reduction policy. The new Government has its own policy, formulated when it was last in power, but it had not announced its intention to restore that policy by the end of the reporting period.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs administered three funds for religious and cultural activities: the Islamic Foundation, the Hindu Welfare Trust, and the Buddhist Welfare Trust. The Christian community consistently rejected government involvement in its religious affairs. The Hindu Welfare Trust received a total of \$882,400 (60 million taka) from the Government for the fiscal year ending June 2009, much of it dedicated to temple-based literacy and religious programs. In addition, the trust money aided in repairing temples, improving cremation pyres, and helping destitute Hindu families afford medical treatment. The Trust spent approximately \$43,478 (3 million taka) in government funds on annual Puja religious worship and festivals.

The Buddhist Welfare Trust, founded in the 1980s, received \$33,333 (2.3 million taka) from the Government in the fiscal year ending June 2009. The trust used funds to repair monasteries, organize training programs for Buddhist monks, and celebrate the Buddhist festival Purnima. There was no public criticism of how the money was apportioned or distributed.

The Government observes most major religious festivals and holy days of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians as national holidays. The Bangladesh Christian Association lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Easter as a national holiday.

Since 2001 the Government routinely has posted law enforcement personnel at religious festivals and events that may be targets for extremists.

Non-Muslim religious bodies were not required to register with the Government; however, all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious ones, were required to register with the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they received foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government could cancel the registration of an NGO suspected to be in breach of its legal or fiduciary obligations and could take other actions, such as blocking foreign fund transfers, to limit its operation.

Religious studies were part of the curriculum in government schools. Children attended classes in which their own religious beliefs were taught. In the past, parents complained about the quality of education, claiming teachers employed by the Government, especially those leading classes on minority religions, were not members of that religion nor qualified to teach it. Schools with few students from religious minority groups often made arrangements with local churches or temples to hold religious studies classes outside school hours, although ensuring

transportation to these sites was often a problem. There were at least 25,000 madrassahs, some of which were funded by the Government. Some observers suggested there might be more than twice that number; the think tank Bangladesh Enterprise Institute puts the figure at nearly 33,000. There were no known government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools, although private religious schools exist throughout the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion; however, societal pressures discouraged proselytizing. Foreign missionaries, like other foreign residents, often faced delays of several months in obtaining or renewing visas. In contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no instances of missionaries reporting monitoring of their activities by intelligence agencies.

There were no financial penalties imposed based on religious beliefs; however, religious minorities were disadvantaged in access to military and government jobs, including elected office. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that the new Government appointed more religious minorities at all levels of government. In the new cabinet, three of 38 Ministers are non-Muslim. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appointed two Buddhists: Industries Minister Dilip Barua and State Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Dipankar Talukder. She also appointed Ramesh Chandra Sen, a Hindu, as Minister of Water Resources. Minority communities in general remained underrepresented in the higher ranks of government. One notable exception was the government-owned Bangladesh Bank, which had approximately 10 percent non-Muslims in its upper ranks. Selection boards for government services often lacked minority representation. Even though employees were not required to disclose their religious affiliation, it could generally be determined by a person's name.

Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination under the defunct Vested Property Act. Although an Awami League Government repealed the Act in 2001, the new Government did not take any concrete action to reverse the property seizures that occurred under the act. The Vested Property Act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed the Government to expropriate "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands. Under the law, the Government seized approximately 2.6 million acres of land, affecting almost all Hindus in the country. According to a study conducted by a Dhaka University

professor, nearly 200,000 Hindu families lost approximately 40,667 acres of land since 2001, despite the annulment of the Act the same year.

In April 2001 Parliament passed the Vested Property Return Act, stipulating that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remained resident citizens. The law required the Government to prepare a list of vested property holdings by October 2001. Claimants were to file claims within 90 days of the publication date. In 2002 Parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act that allowed the Government unlimited time to return the vested properties and gave control of the properties, including the right to lease them, to local government employees. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not prepared a list of such properties.

Under the Muslim family ordinance, females inherit less than males, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and polygamy without the consent of the first wife, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. Due to ignorance of the law in rural areas, couples occasionally did not register their marriages. Under the law, a Muslim husband is required to pay his former wife alimony for three months, but this was not always enforced. There was little societal pressure to enforce it, and case backlogs made it difficult, if not impossible, to get redress through the courts.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 15, 2008, the Special Branch of police in Brahmanbaria prevented the Ahmadiyya community from holding a religious convention. Following an intervention by higher authorities, the Special Branch lifted its objections and the event was held peacefully. A similar incident occurred at Shalshiri in Panchagarh district on March 21, 2008. There were no further developments in either of these cases or similar incidents during the reporting period.

Former *Prothom Alo* cartoonist Arifur Rahman, who in 2007 sparked national outrage after drawing a cartoon considered blasphemous against Islam, is now employed with another publication. The editor of *Prothom Alo*, the leading Bangla language newspaper, apologized for the cartoon's publication and fired Rahman. There were no further developments in his situation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There was one reported incident of forced religious conversion. According to the human rights NGO Ain O Shalish Kendro (ASK), on July 4, 2008, a religious leader in a madrassah near Shahbag in Dhaka forcibly abducted and converted to Islam a 13-year-old Hindu named Poresh Chandra Sarker. After his family informed police of his absence, police found him and placed him in custody, along with his abductor. At the end of the reporting period, the child's case was pending, and the judge had not delivered a verdict on whether the boy could return to his parents or would have to go to the madrassah.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warned that they would take action against those who attempted to disrupt the celebrations.

Through additional security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Christian, Hindu and secular Bengali festivals, including Durga Puja, Christmas, Easter, and Pohela Boisakh (Bengali New Year). The Government deployed extra security forces in areas with high minority voter turnout during the national parliamentary elections in 2008.

The Government helped support the Council for Interfaith Harmony-Bangladesh, an organization created in 2005 with a mandate to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence among different communities. This initiative came in response to a bombing campaign in the fall of 2005 by an Islamist extremist group that sought the imposition of Shari'a. The organization has facilitated dialogue and panel discussions on religious matters; local media have covered some of these activities.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period. Clashes between religious groups occasionally occurred. Violence directed against religious minority communities continued to result in the loss of lives and property, but the

true motives--whether religious animosity, criminal intent, personal disputes, or property disputes--were often unclear. Religious minorities were vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they usually were reluctant to seek recourse from a criminal justice system they perceived as corrupt and ineffective. Police frequently were ineffective in upholding law and order and sometimes were slow to assist religious minorities. This promoted a greater atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against minorities. However, persons who practiced different religious beliefs often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practiced their religious beliefs without interference from Sunnis.

Religious minorities were not underrepresented in the private sector.

Reported incidents against religious minorities during the reporting period included killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. Most of these reports could not be independently verified. There also were reported incidents of members of the Muslim community attacking each other on holidays due to a perception that some events were un-Islamic. The Government sometimes failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who were often local gang leaders.

Attacks against the Hindu community continued, although numbers dropped significantly from the previous year. According to the Bangladesh Buddhist-Hindu-Christian Unity Council (BHBCOP), during the period from April 2008 to March 2009, there were three killings, 10 attacks on or occupation of temples, 12 incidents of land grabbing, two cases of rape, and three kidnappings.

According to *Shamokal*, the daily newspaper in Bangla, on March 30, 2009, 50 police officers and 100 others evicted approximately 400 individuals, mostly Hindus, from Sutrapur in old Dhaka and destroyed their ancestral homes with hammers. The mob, allegedly led by the brother of a local Awami League politician, also destroyed the oldest Shiva temple in Kalirghat. The individuals evicted claimed that the land was registered in their name in 1945 and that they had been paying municipal taxes and utility bills. After the passage of the Vested Property Act, the area was registered as "vested property." The Hindu residents alleged that several powerful local leaders had filed a case claiming the property. Police sided against the Hindu occupants, claiming they had been illegally occupying the land.

According to the BHBCOP and *Shamokal*, on January 28, 2009, in Faridpur, a group led by a former local politician vandalized idols in a local Shmashan Kali (Hindu) temple and then burned down the temple.

The newspaper *Prothom Alo* and the BHBCOP reported on January 10, 2009, that more than 150 armed individuals attacked a mostly Hindu village near Gazipur, outside Dhaka, after several of the village's residents claimed that young girls were being sexually harassed. The mob beat many of the individuals, damaged several houses, and physically assaulted a few of the women. They also damaged the image of the goddess at the lone Kali temple.

Two days after the December 29 parliamentary elections, an estimated 15 persons armed with knives and sticks stormed into the house of Nityalal Das, a Hindu leader of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), at Kuliarchar in Kishoreganj District, beating and stabbing him. His family refused to divulge the identity of the attackers or comment on their motive to ASK investigators, who learned from his neighbors that they believed he had come under attack because of his position as a prominent local Hindu affiliated with the BNP. According to press accounts, the leader of the attack was Abul Mansur Rubel, brother of a local AL leader, and his nephew Jishan. Shariful Alam, the four-party alliance candidate who lost the parliamentary election from Kishoreganj 6 (Bhairab-Kulyarchar) constituency, said the victim failed to press charges out of fear that pursuing the case might attract unwanted attention.

On December 5, 2008, several persons destroyed part of a Hindu temple on disputed land in Keraniganj on the outskirts of Dhaka and put signs on the structure claiming they owned the land. Rekha Bhatyachariya, a resident of the temple compound, filed a criminal case accusing more than five individuals of vandalizing the temple. Rekha claimed the original owner of the land had donated it to be used to build a religious structure; the accused claimed to have purchased the land from the original owner. According to ASK, the attack left Hindus in the area in a heightened state of fear.

Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period.

According to the BHBCOP and *Prothom Alo*, on January 28, 2009, in Tangail, a gang of unidentified attackers killed Basanti Mangsa, a Christian headmistress of Gaira Missionary Primary School, as she was returning home from a meeting.

Two teachers were also injured in what was apparently a well-planned attack. The motive was unclear and the case remained unsolved.

Human rights groups and press reports indicated that vigilantism against women accused of moral transgressions occurred in rural areas, often under a fatwa, and included punishments such as whipping. During 2008 and until the end of the reporting period, religious leaders issued 37 fatwas, demanding punishments that ranged from lashings and other physical assaults to shunning by family and community members, according to the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a human rights organization focused on women's rights.

There were approximately 100,000 Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. Although mainstream Muslims rejected some of the Ahmadiyya teachings, most of them supported Ahmadis' right to practice without fear or persecution. As compared to the previous reporting period, harassment of Ahmadis by those who denounced their teachings declined.

Prothom Alo reported that on July 27, 2008, the Muslim religious extremist group Amra Dhakabashi resumed its campaign to declare the Ahmadiyya non-Muslim. The organization filed civil cases against the religious leaders of the Ahmadiyya in all 64 districts and launched a cell phone text message-based defamation campaign against Ahmadiyya leadership. By the end of the reporting period, these campaigns had been unsuccessful in provoking a widespread backlash against the Ahmadiyya community.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with officials at all levels of the Government as well as with political party leaders and representatives of religious and minority communities. During the reporting period, the Embassy emphasized the importance of free, fair, and credible national parliamentary elections in 2008 with full participation of all ethnic and religious communities. Following the election, the Embassy reiterated the need for an inclusive political process for all citizens regardless of religion. The Embassy continued to express concern about human rights, including the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. Embassy staff traveled to various regions investigating human rights cases, including some involving religious minorities, and met with civil society members, NGOs, local religious leaders, and other citizens to discuss concerns about pre- and post-election violence. They also encouraged law enforcement to take proactive measures to protect the rights of religious minorities.

U.S. Embassy and visiting U.S. Government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate support. Prior to the elections, the Ambassador visited a prominent Hindu temple in Dhaka and met with leaders from the community to demonstrate the U.S. Government's support for an electoral process that was inclusive and free of violence. On election day he observed voters in a predominantly Hindu polling center.

The Embassy assisted U.S. faith-based relief organizations in filing documents for approval of schools and other projects. The Government has been willing to discuss such subjects and has been helpful in resolving problems. The Embassy also has acted as an advocate in the Home Ministry for these organizations in resolving problems with visas.

The Embassy encouraged the Government, through the Ministry for Religious Affairs, to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders. After a pilot program, the U.S. Government provided orientation sessions for religious leaders on human rights and gender equality, among other topics. For the fourth year in a row, the U.S. Government sponsored the visit of a prominent U.S. Muslim cleric to tour the country and speak. The cleric visited the southeastern city of Chittagong and addressed several audiences in Dhaka about Qur'anic interpretations that support religious tolerance and freedom and promote gender equality.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Government continued to make religious freedom, especially the problems facing the population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a topic of discussion in meetings with government officials. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, visited the Hill Tracts over the course of the reporting period and met with senior government officials to relay concerns about the treatment of minorities.

Democracy and governance projects supported by the U.S. Government included tolerance and minority rights components.

BARBADOS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 166 square miles and a population of 280,000. According to the 2000 official census, more than 95 percent of the population is Christian, although persons may not be active in any particular denomination. The Anglican Church constitutes the largest religious group with 70,000 members, of whom an estimated 67 percent are active, followed by Seventh-day Adventists, 16,000, 10,000 active; Roman Catholics, 11,000, an estimated 20 percent active; and Pentecostals 7,000, more than 50 percent active. Methodists number 5,000, according to church officials, although many more claimed Methodist affiliation in the previous official census; an estimated 60 percent are active. There are 2,500 members of Jehovah's Witnesses; more than 95 percent are active. Baptists, Moravians, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are present in small numbers.

The number of non-Christians is small. There are 4,000 Muslims, most of whom are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Indian state of Gujarat. A few immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as 200 native-born persons, constitute the rest of the growing Muslim community. There are three mosques and an Islamic center. Other religious groups include Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and members of the Baha'i Faith.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government to obtain duty-free import privileges or tax benefits, but no complaints were received that the process was onerous.

Religious instruction is included in the public school curriculum as "values education." The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from other religious groups are also invited to speak to students.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools. There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Barbados Christian Council and the Caribbean Conference of Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different Christian denominations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives also discussed religious freedom with local groups and other organizations.

BELARUS

The Constitution affirms the equality of religions and denominations before the law; however, it contains language that restricts freedom of religion.

The Government continued to restrict religious freedom in accordance with the provisions of a 2002 law on religion and a 2003 concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the only officially recognized Orthodox denomination. Although there is no state religion, the concordat grants the BOC privileged status.

Authorities kept many religious communities waiting as long as several years for decisions about registration or property restitution. Authorities harassed and fined members of certain religious groups, especially those regarded as bearers of foreign cultural influence or as having a political agenda. Protestants in particular attracted negative attention. Foreign missionaries, clergy, and humanitarian workers affiliated with churches faced many government-imposed obstacles, including deportation and visa refusal or cancellation. Restrictions on foreign clergy increased during the reporting period.

While some members of society took positive actions to promote religious freedom, instances of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice occurred, including numerous acts of vandalism and arson of religious sites, buildings, and memorials.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 80,154 square miles and a population of 9.7 million. According to January 2009 data from the Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs (OPRRNA), approximately 60 percent of citizens consider themselves religious, of whom an estimated 80 percent belong to the BOC, 14 percent to the Roman Catholic Church, 4 percent to Eastern religious groups (including Muslims, Hare Krishnas, and Baha'is), and 2 percent to Protestant groups (including Seventh-day Adventists, Apostolic Christians, and Lutherans) as well as Old Believers and Jehovah's Witnesses. Of those who identify as Belarusian Orthodox or Roman Catholic, 18 and 50 percent,

respectively, regularly attend church services. There are also adherents of the Greek Catholic Church and of Orthodox groups other than the BOC. Jewish groups stated that between 30,000 and 50,000 persons identify themselves as Jewish. Most Jews are not religiously active.

In January 2009 OPRRNA reported 3,218 religious organizations of 25 religious confessions and denominations in the country, including 3,062 registered religious communities and 156 national and confessional organizations (monasteries, brotherhoods, and missionary sites). This included the following: 1,473 Belarusian Orthodox, 500 Evangelical Christian, 467 Roman Catholic, 269 Evangelical Christian Baptist, 72 Seventh-day Adventist, 54 Full Gospel Christians, 32 Old Believer, 29 Jewish, 27 Lutheran, 26 Jehovah's Witnesses, 25 Muslim, 21 New Apostolic Church, 17 Progressive Judaism, 14 Greek Catholic, nine Apostolic Christian, six Hare Krishna, five Baha'i, five Christ's Church, four Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), two Messianic, one Reform Church, one Presbyterian, one Armenian Apostolic, one Latin Catholic, and one St. Jogan Church.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution affirms the equality of religions and denominations before the law; however, it contains restrictive language stipulating that cooperation between the state and religious organizations "is regulated with regard for their influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people." OPRRNA regulates all religious matters.

A 2002 religion law recognizes the determining role of the Orthodox Church in the development of the traditions of the Belarusian people, as well as the historical importance of groups commonly referred to as "traditional faiths": Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Evangelical Lutheranism. However, the traditional faiths mentioned in the law do not include religious groups such as the Priestless Old Believers and Calvinist Churches, which have historical roots in the country dating to the 17th century.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Orthodox Christmas, Orthodox Easter and Catholic/Protestant (Western) Easter, Radonitsa (Great Tuesday or Easter of the Dead), Orthodox Remembrance of the Ancestors Day, and Catholic/Protestant (Western) Christmas.

Although the 2002 law guarantees religious freedom, it contains restrictive elements that increase the Government's control. It required all previously registered groups to reregister by 2004, and it bans all religious activity by unregistered groups. In addition, it confines the activity of religious communities to areas where they are registered and establishes complex registration requirements that some communities, both "traditional" and "nontraditional," have difficulty fulfilling.

The 2002 law requires all religious groups to receive prior governmental approval to import and distribute literature, prevents foreigners from leading religious organizations, and denies religious communities the right to establish schools to train clergy.

The 2002 law establishes three tiers of religious groups: religious communities, religious associations, and national religious associations. Religious communities, or local individual religious organizations, must include at least 20 persons over the age of 18 who live in neighboring areas. Religious associations must include at least ten religious communities, one of which must have been active in the country for at least 20 years, and may be constituted only by a national-level religious association. National religious associations can be formed only when there are active religious communities in a majority of the country's six regions.

A religious community must submit a list of its founders' names, their places of residence and citizenship, and signatures; copies of its founding statutes; the minutes of its founding meeting; and permission from the regional authorities confirming the community's right to occupy or use any property indicated in its founding statutes. Regional executive committees (for groups outside of Minsk) or the Minsk City Executive Committee handle all registration applications. For a community practicing a religion not previously "known" to the Government, information about the faith must also be submitted. No previously "unknown" religious communities were registered during the reporting period.

A religious association must provide a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission for the association to be at its designated location, and the minutes from its founding congress. Religious associations have the exclusive right to establish religious educational institutions, invite foreigners to work with religious groups, and organize cloistered and monastic communities. All applications to establish associations and national associations must be submitted to OPRRNA. The Government registered 85

religious communities in 2008. Christian communities maintained that the law heavily restricts their activities, suppresses freedom of religion, and legalizes criminal prosecution of individuals for their religious beliefs.

A 2003 concordat between the BOC and the Government guarantees the BOC autonomy in its internal affairs, freedom to perform religious rites and other activities, and a special relationship with the state. The concordat recognizes the BOC's "influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and national traditions of the Belarusian people." It calls for the Government and the BOC to cooperate in implementing policy in various fields, including education, development, protection of cultural legacies, and security. Although it states that the agreement would not limit the religious freedom of other religious groups, the concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to combat unnamed "pseudoreligious structures that present a danger to individuals and society." In addition, the BOC possesses the exclusive right to use the word "Orthodox" in its title and to use the image of the Cross of Saint Euphrosyne, the patron saint of the country, as its symbol.

On March 27, 2009, BOC Metropolitan Filaret called upon the Government to effectively regulate the Internet and control access to its "dangerous resources." President Lukashenka praised the BOC's fine reputation and work in maintaining "peace and spirit of tolerance" among different congregations and pledged to continue supporting it.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted religious freedom both directly and indirectly. The Government enforced laws that limit freedom of worship, speech, and assembly, and state registration is compulsory before religious activity can take place. The Government sometimes was responsible for and regularly failed to condemn acts of religious insensitivity or intolerance. The Government frequently referred to groups it did not consider to be traditional as "nontraditional" and widely used the term "sect" when referring to such groups, although it is not an official designation.

President Lukashenka made highly offensive remarks against Baptist communities during his meeting with Interior Ministry senior personnel on June 29, 2009. He pointed to the Ministry's "criminal negligence in human resources and ideological work," and he indicated that some law enforcement officers were "active" members of "ambiguous religious sects" and disclosed classified information to their Protestant "brothers" and associates. President Lukashenka further

condemned attempts "to recruit to religious sects" Interior Ministry Academy students and faculty members.

On June 29, 2009, the Center for Spiritual Education and Social Services, under the BOC, held a discussion called "Sects in Contemporary Protestantism." The speakers, in particular an OPRRNA representative, maintained that Pentecostal communities were the largest "sect" operating in the country and called them "aggressive," "politicized," and exercising "negative influence" on believers. Protestant and human rights advocates expressed their grave concerns over public "derogatory" statements regarding Pentecostals, which could incite religious contention and hatred.

Many "traditional" and "nontraditional" religious groups continued to experience problems renting, purchasing, or registering properties to establish places of worship or to build churches, as well as difficulty reacquiring state-controlled religious properties. Groups also encountered difficulty legally converting residential property to religious use; the housing code permits the use of such property for nonresidential purposes only with the permission of local executive and administrative bodies. As a result, several Protestant churches and "nontraditional" groups were at an impasse: denied permission to convert their properties for religious use because they were not registered, but unable to register due to the lack of a legal address. Such groups often were obliged to meet in violation of these requirements or in the homes of individual members.

A government decree specifies measures to ensure public order and safety during general public gatherings. Some officials cited the decree as a basis for canceling or refusing to extend agreements with religious groups for the use of their facilities. During the reporting period, it remained difficult, particularly for unregistered groups, to rent a public facility. Protestant communities suffered most from this decree, since they were less likely to own property and needed to rent public space when their members were too numerous to meet in private homes.

The Government often restricted peaceful assembly for religious activities. On December 14, 2008, riot police briefly detained Syarhey Lukanin and two associates for holding a public evangelical service in central Minsk. Police threatened Lukanin with criminal charges for "unsanctioned religious activities" and dispersed the gathering, but they released the three without charge.

The Government, in particular its ideology officers, targeted and harassed unregistered religious communities (see Abuses).

On January 8, 2009, a court in Babruysk fined Baptist activist Alyaksandr Yermalitski \$62 for hosting an illegal prayer at his home on December 5, 2008.

On September 16, 2008, Barysau authorities cancelled a Christian music festival minutes before it was supposed to begin, despite having previously granted permission for the event. The authorities subsequently issued a letter stating the cancellation was due to "flaws" in the initial application to hold the event.

Foreign missionaries, clergy, and charity workers faced increased government obstacles, including deportation and visa refusal or revocation. The Government continued to enforce the increased restrictions on foreign clergy introduced in January 2008. Only registered national religious associations may apply to OPRRNA for permission to invite foreign clergy, and permission must be granted before foreign religious workers may serve in local congregations, teach or study at local institutions, participate in charitable work, or expand foreign contacts of religious groups. OPRRNA has the right to deny requests without explanation. The guidelines affected Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations the most, reducing the number of Roman Catholic clergy and limiting the humanitarian and charitable projects of western Protestant churches.

On December 19, 2008, Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, head of the Belarusian Roman Catholic Church, expressed serious concern over arbitrary expulsions of Polish priests and the significant lack of priests due to their lengthy training at local schools. OPRRNA representative Maryna Tsvilik complained at a parliamentary meeting on December 9 that Catholic education took too long and that priests invited by the Catholic Church from abroad had a different mentality and culture from Belarusians and were unaware about political and social processes in the country. She opined that the Government successfully managed to stem uncontrolled arrival of foreign clergy and called the lack of Catholic priests "an outstanding issue."

In December 2008 three Roman Catholic priests from Poland--Jan Bronowski, Jan Skonczny, and Andrzej Krayczik--were denied registration of their visas despite having ministered in Belarus for many years. OPRRNA stated that the denial was not a ban; rather, the priests allegedly failed to "master" the Belarusian language and therefore were not qualified to minister to Belarusians. Also in December 2008 OPRRNA banned three Polish nuns and another priest from working in the Minsk-Mahilyou diocese as well as Polish priest Zbigniew Grigorzewicz from continuing religious work after his three-year service in Belarus. Authorities

ignored a petition and 400 signatures collected by Grigorcewicz's parishioners in his support and refused to provide grounds for the denial.

On October 15, 2008, airport border services detained and then deported without explanation Benjamin Brukh, a Protestant bishop from Ukraine. Brukh was a founder of the Full Gospel Church of Jesus Christ in Minsk in 1991.

Observers expressed concern that lack of uniform government guidance on implementation of changes in 2006 to visa laws affected the ability of missionaries to live and work in the country. As in previous reporting periods, approval for visits by foreign religious workers often involved a lengthy bureaucratic process. The law requires one-year, multiple-entry "spiritual activities" visas for foreign missionaries and clergy. An organization inviting foreign clergy must make a written request to OPRRNA, including the proposed dates and reason for the requested visit. Even if the visit is for nonreligious purposes (such as charitable activities), representatives must obtain a visa and permission from OPRRNA. OPRRNA has 20 days in which to respond, and there is no provision for appeal of its decision.

Authorities frequently questioned foreign missionaries and humanitarian workers, as well as the local citizens who worked with them, about the sources and uses of their funding. There were also credible reports that security personnel followed foreign workers.

On February 7, 2009, police deported two Danish businessmen and humanitarian aid workers and banned their entry for one year for proselytizing and conducting illegal religious practices. They were apprehended at a worship service at the Living Faith Church in the city of Homyel. On February 20, 2009, a Homyel district court denied their appeal to challenge the deportation orders.

Archbishop Jovan of the Holy Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BAOC), a religious freedom activist, continued to be denied entry into the country; the Government does not recognize the BAO.

The Government does not permit foreign missionaries to engage in religious activity outside of their host institutions. Transferring between religious organizations, including parishes, requires prior state permission.

Internal affairs agencies may compel the departure of foreign clergy by denying registrations and stay permits. Authorities may act independently or based on recommendations from other government entities.

Legislation prohibits "subversive activities" by foreign organizations and the establishment of offices by foreign organizations whose activities incite "national, religious, and racial enmity" or that could "have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people."

Foreign citizens officially in the country for nonreligious work can be reprimanded or expelled if they participate in religious activities. On June 26, 2009, police deported Simon Milongo, a Nigerian preacher, after his participation in a World of Hope Church service in Babruysk on June 23. Milongo held a Russian permanent residence permit and was charged with illegally crossing the Belarus border.

By law citizens are not prohibited from proselytizing and may speak freely about their religious beliefs; however, in practice authorities often interfered with or punished some individuals who proselytized on behalf of registered or unregistered religious groups. Authorities regulated every aspect of proselytizing and literature distribution.

During the reporting period, the Government monitored peaceful minority religious groups, especially those perceived as "foreign" or "cults." Credible sources reported that state security officers often attended Protestant services to conduct surveillance. On April 15, 2009, an OPRRNA official stated that authorities not only closely observed and restricted "illegal" religious activities of such groups as the Baptist Council of Churches and the Unification Church but also confiscated information materials from the latter for assessment to prevent their "violating human rights and freedoms" and "putting individuals' psychological and physical wellbeing at risk."

The Government continued to use textbooks that promote religious intolerance, especially toward "nontraditional" religious groups. Leaders of Protestant communities criticized language in the textbook *Basics of Home and Personal Security* as discriminatory against Protestants, particularly the chapter entitled "Beware of Sects." The chapter includes a paragraph informing students of such "sects" as Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Maria, White Brotherhood, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Ministry of Education continued to use the textbook *Man, Society, and State*, which labels Protestants and Hare Krishnas as "sects,"

despite protests by religious groups. Neither book was republished by the end of the period covered by this report.

Anti-Semitism is tolerated by the state, although the situation improved during the reporting period. Anti-Semitic acts declined in the period covered by this report but were only sporadically or ineffectively investigated. Neo-Nazi activity, which authorities typically characterized as hooliganism, also occurred (see Section III).

In February 2009 the Masty Regional Committee denied permission for local civil society activists to unveil a memorial plaque at the site of the former Jewish ghetto in the nearby town of Luna. The activists wanted to put up a plaque in the Belarusian and Hebrew languages along with the existing one in Russian and Hebrew. They also noted that the latter was located away from the ghetto site.

Limited restitution of religious property occurred. The Mahilyou Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish community reported that in May 2009 President Lukashenka decreed a return to the community of an old synagogue pending a decision of the local authorities. There is no legal basis for restitution of property seized during the Soviet and Nazi periods, and the law restricts the restitution of property being used for cultural, sports, or educational purposes. The Government did not return buildings if it had nowhere to move the current occupants. For example, most of the Jewish community's requests for the return of synagogues, which were in use as theaters, museums, sports complexes, and a beer hall, were refused.

Local and international Jewish leaders appealed to President Lukashenka to preserve a 19th-century wooden synagogue in Lyuban after local authorities demolished a similar synagogue in April 2009, allegedly due to its poor condition and "lack of historical or cultural value." Heritage preservation activists also protested the destruction and urged the Government to erect a memorial sign at the site.

No decision about the future of a former Bernardine monastery complex in downtown Minsk was reached by the end of the reporting period. On September 10, 2008, an OPRRNA official again publicly committed to return the complex to the community; however, the official noted that moving the state archives from the property to a different venue would take a long time.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to abuse the religious freedom of members of several religious groups. As in the past, the most common charge against religious leaders was organizing or hosting an unauthorized meeting, a charge that arises from a law circumscribing freedom of assembly. The law allows persons to gather to pray in private homes; however, it imposes restrictions on holding rituals, rites, or ceremonies in such locations and requires prior permission from local authorities. Protestant and non-BOC Orthodox congregations were frequently fined or warned for operating illegally during the reporting period.

On June 22, 2009, the Minsk city prosecutor's office opened a criminal case against Yauheni Volkau, a Unification Church of Moon activist, on charges that he acted on behalf of an unregistered religious organization. The case, the first of its kind, was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On June 17, 2009, Horki town authorities fined local Protestant activist Pyotr Malanachkin \$60 for distributing religious and other printed materials. They also dismantled a book stand in front of his house that carried copies of the Bible, Human Rights Declaration, and similar publications.

On May 28, 2009, Baptist pastor Mikalay Palyashchuk reportedly was fined \$745 and his associate Yauheni Yahorau received a warning for violating mass events regulations. On March 20, 2009, a Babruysk ideology official threatened Palyashchuk with prosecution if his community, which had been denied state registration on numerous occasions, continued to meet for worship at a private residence. On March 4, 2009, Palyashchuk was warned and ordered to destroy religious literature seized on January 11, 2009, from a Christian street library in Asipovichy that Palyashchuk and his associates were operating. The Supreme Court reportedly overturned the orders at a later date and ruled to expropriate rather than destroy the printed religious materials.

On May 12, 2009, a Mahilyou district court fined Lyudmila Batsyuk, the coordinator for the Belarusian Christian social organization Cliff House, \$50 for organizing an illegal religious group and engaging individuals in illegal religious activities. The charges stemmed from Batsyuk's unsanctioned "Christian techniques" in running a rehabilitation program for alcoholics and drug addicts.

On March 20, 2009, police detained for two hours six Baptists who were singing hymns and distributing Christian books in Shchuchyn. All the printed materials were confiscated "for examination."

On March 2, 2009, the Supreme Court upheld registration requirements for religious communities and denied Pentecostal pastor Valyantsin Baravik's appeal to challenge his June 2008 fine for leading an illegal religious service and unregistered organization at his home in Masty.

On February 20, 2009, a Lelchytsy regional court fined local Roman Catholic priest Vital Mysonau \$37 for installing a cross in the town suburbs in 2008.

On January 22, 2009, a Lyuban regional court sentenced Mikhail Mikhaliyena, a Muslim, to three months in jail for evading military service and failing to pay an associated fine. In 2007 Mikhaliyena was fined \$735 for evading army enlistment due to his religious beliefs, claiming there were no possibilities for Muslims to observe their religious rites in the army.

On January 6, 2009, authorities issued a warning to 15 Baptists after police detained them and confiscated religious literature from their street library in Kobryn on December 20, 2008.

On November 10, 2008, the Belarusian Committee for State Security (BKGB) extensively questioned New Life Church (NLC) member Syarhey Vashkevich about his previous engagement in charity and in connection with the July 4, 2008, bombings in Minsk. Vashkevich refused to be fingerprinted or sign any interrogation protocols.

On August 5, 2008, BKGB officers searched the residence of Protestant pastor Ernest Sabila and confiscated his computer.

On July 30, 2008, Svislach town authorities dismissed numerous appeals to lift their June 2008 ban on the Grace Pentecostal Church holding an open-air baptism service in a lake. Authorities alleged in their refusal that the rite of baptism conducted by the Grace community "would arouse mixed reactions" among the mainly Orthodox and Catholic town population.

On July 25, 2008, a Hrodna district court fined Baptist pastor Yuri Krauchuk \$250 for leading a Sunday home worship without state approval.

On July 23, 2008, the head of the Ruzhany Village Committee and local BKGB officers closely observed and unsuccessfully attempted to interrupt a funeral service led by BAOC Father Ioann Grudnitskyi.

On July 18 and 19, 2008, police apprehended Belarusian Christian Democracy Party activists Mikalaiy Dzemidzenka and Kastus Shytaal at a Catholic youth meeting in Ivyanets and confiscated their religious materials. Police released both without charge; however, Dzemidzenka was detained overnight.

After a long delay, on November 19, 2008, the Supreme Economic Court resumed hearing a case, previously adjourned in 2007, regarding the forced sale of NLC property that the authorities had refused to register as a place for worship. On January 13, 2009, it released its decision to uphold the initial judgment to remove the property from NLC ownership. On March 5, 2009, the court decision was upheld on appeal. On March 16, 2009, the city administration offered a one-acre plot at a different location; the original size of the NLC property is four acres. In an interview to the state television on March 9, 2009, OPRRNA accused the NLC of violating children's rights to education by refusing to vacate their premises, on which a day-care center or a school was planned to be built. Hancharenka announced on May 8, 2009, that the NLC community unanimously voted to reject the city administration's offer. On May 14, 2009, the NLC received and defied eviction orders from the local district housing maintenance agency to vacate the building by June 1, 2009. In a June 9, 2009, letter to the NLC, Minsk city authorities echoed OPRRNA's March 9 statements and urged the group to reconsider an offer of a land plot. At the end of the reporting period, the NLC had not vacated the premises.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite lengthy bureaucratic procedures, the Government took positive steps to restitute property, assign land plots, and authorize construction of new Roman Catholic churches. On May 18, 2009, the Galshany Village Committee returned part of a building from a former Franciscan monastery to the Hrodna Roman Catholic diocese. The St. Anthony community in Mahilyou received permission to build a church on July 8, 2008, after four years of seeking permits and official authorization. The Mother of God of the Rosary community in Minsk received permission for constructing a church in 2008. According to the OPRRNA June

2009 report, the Government returned six religious and other buildings to the BOC and one facility to the Judaic community during the reporting period.

At his April 15, 2009, meeting with Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, President Lukashenka reiterated his support to the Roman Catholic Church, stating that the Government "highly values the mission of the Catholic Church."

Dokshytsy town authorities reinstalled a memorial stone at a local Jewish cemetery after it was reported missing on April 5, 2009. Authorities pledged to take additional measures to prevent vandal attacks and secure the memorial.

The Government registered six of seven communities of the International Society for Hare Krishna Consciousness in December 2008.

On December 19, 2008, a Minsk district court banned 13 religious books and other printed materials published and distributed by the Minsk-based Christian Initiative Company as "extremist" and "anti-Semitic" for urging "ethnic and religious hatred and violence." The Prosecutor General's Office recalled the company's publishing license and seized 50,000 copies of the materials.

On October 20, 2008, President Lukashenka attended a ceremony to mark the 65th anniversary of the Minsk ghetto annihilation in central Minsk. The President paid tribute to the contribution of Jews to the victory in the World War II and commemorated the Jewish victims. He also committed to countering any signs of Nazism and religious intolerance. The Jewish communities praised the Government's support in organizing and observing the anniversary.

In October 2008 the Mahilyou Jewish community erected a monument in commemoration of the Holocaust victims after local authorities approved their fourth petition.

On September 15, 2008, and again on April 29, 2008, human remains from an old Jewish cemetery discovered during excavation work near a stadium in Homyel were reburied at another local Jewish cemetery. A rabbi traveled from Israel to conduct the ceremony. Local government officials attended and facilitated the reburial.

On August 5, 2008, the Government adopted a law banning any advertisement of the "occultism" services in printed and electronic media, a step welcomed by the Christian community.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

While some members of society tried to promote religious freedom, societal abuses and discrimination based on religious beliefs occurred, and anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward minority religious groups persisted. Neo-Nazis were widely believed to be behind numerous vandal attacks, particularly in targeting Jewish sites, and engaged in activities promoting religious intolerance and ethnic discord. Local human rights advocates continued to voice serious concerns about the Russian National Union's activities in Navapolatsk during the reporting period, including vandalism and painting swastikas on buildings. The city prosecutor's office denied two appeals to investigate such incidents in 2009, citing that no offenders were identified during preliminary checks.

On May 11, 2009, police charged a young man with theft in Navapolatsk for attempting to steal a bell from an Orthodox Church during a Christian fair.

Between April 28 and May 9, 2009, vandals damaged 39 tombstones at a cemetery in Minsk. Police detained two Minsk residents on May 26 and charged them with hooliganism.

On July 27, 2008, an arsonist attempted to set fire to a house of Protestant Word for Life pastor Viktor Masharousky in Mahilyou. This was the fourth arson attack on his house. By the end of the reporting period, the investigation reportedly was completed and the arsonist sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

On July 1, 2008, the Hrodna Greek Catholic Mother of God of Fatima community released a statement dismissing "myths and Soviet ideological clichés" about the role of the Greek Catholic Church in Belarus after the state First National Channel broadcast a historic documentary claiming that the Church was "hostile" to the Belarusian population.

Several Jewish religious sites were vandalized during the reporting period. On June 2, 2009, vandals damaged 13 gravestones at an old Jewish cemetery in Barysau. Police opened a criminal case, and the local Jewish community urged local authorities to commence patrolling the cemetery.

On May 12, 2009, vandals sprayed paint and drew swastikas on four memorial stones in Minsk commemorating the German Jews assassinated in Belarus. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On May 9, 2009, during Victory Day celebrations, vandals set fire to wreaths and flowers laid at the memorial to Holocaust victims in Brest. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The memorial has been vandalized many times since it was erected in 1992.

On April 22, 2009, anti-Semitic graffiti and swastikas were painted on walls of a synagogue in Vitsyebsk. The Jewish community filed a criminal case with the police. No vandals were convicted for previous attacks on the synagogue.

The Jewish community continued to express concern over the concept of a "greater Slavic union" popular among ultranationalist organizations active in the country, including the Russian National Union. Jewish leaders petitioned the authorities to investigate neo-Nazi activities, citing continued vandalism, anti-Semitic graffiti, and threats to civil society and religious congregations. There was limited progress compared to previous reporting periods.

Chauvinistic and Russian ultranationalist newspapers and literature, digital video disks, and videocassettes continued to be sold at Pravoslavnaya Kniga (Orthodox Bookstore), which sells religious literature and paraphernalia but is not associated with the Belarusian Orthodox Church. The store is part of the Khristianskaya Initsiativa Company, whose general director often writes xenophobic articles. Several anti-Semitic titles were regularly available at the bookstore, including Oleg Platonov's *Myths and Truth about Pogroms* and *The Mystery of the Zion Protocols: A Conspiracy Against Russia*, which claim that Judaism is hostile to Russian civilization and Christianity, that early 20th-century pogroms were a Zionist provocation, and that Jews murdered Russia's leadership and unleashed terror in Soviet times.

The official BOC website continued to honor Hauriyil Belastoksky, a young child allegedly murdered by Jews near Grodno in 1690, as one of its saints and martyrs. A memorial prayer to be said on the anniversary of his death alleges the "martyred and courageous Hauriyil exposed Jewish dishonesty."

Historically the country has been an area of both interaction and conflict between Belarusian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, although relations between the two groups improved during the reporting period. During his meeting with President Lukashenka in the Vatican on April 27, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI reportedly praised constructive ties and peaceful coexistence between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in Belarus.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

U.S. embassy staff maintained regular contact with representatives of religious groups and met with resident and visiting U.S. citizens of various affiliations to discuss religious freedom issues in the country. Embassy officials attended several events hosted by religious groups, including the unveiling of religious monuments, and attended seminars on religious freedoms and their violations. The Embassy demonstrated support for religious freedom by attending trials of persons persecuted for religious reasons. The U.S. Government denounced incidents of anti-Semitism and took action to help prevent future acts, including following up on reports of desecrated Jewish memorial sites and cemeteries. The Embassy monitored the continuing sale of anti-Semitic and xenophobic literature in stores and state media distributors. Embassy officials regularly included stops at religious sites during regional travel.

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with representatives of other foreign diplomatic missions to demonstrate solidarity in their support for religious freedom.

BELGIUM

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, conditions were not optimal for groups regarded as "sects" or "cults."

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period; however, government officials continued to have the authority to monitor religious groups. There were two raids on religious institutions as part of criminal law investigations. Religious and political leaders acknowledged the need to reform the way faiths are recognized and financed and to further the dialogue between recognized and nonrecognized faiths.

Reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice continued. But these reports are often difficult to ascribe to a primary motivation of ethnicity or religious belief, as they are often inextricably linked.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 11,780 square miles and a population of 10.6 million.

On November 5, 2008, in a written statement to Parliament, the Justice Minister stated that determining affiliation is at the sole discretion of each religion individually, and that the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion did not allow government intervention in affiliation matters. He added that because of these principles the Government could not intervene in determining the number of worshippers for each faith.

According to a 2007 report of the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF), 4.8 million inhabitants identify themselves as Catholic. Earlier statistics indicated that the number of nonbelievers is 924,000, and the number of those who identify themselves as belonging to the nonreligious philosophical community is 892,500.

The KBF report gives the number of adherents belonging to smaller religious groups as follows: Islam, 400,000; Protestantism, 132,000; Orthodox, 70,000;

Judaism, 50,000; Anglicanism, 10,800; and organized secular humanism, 110,000. The larger nonrecognized religious groups include Jehovah's Witnesses with 23,701 baptized and 50,000 "churchgoers;" independent Protestant congregations, 10,000; Buddhists, 10,000; members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 4,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 2,000; Hindus, 5,000; Sikhs, 3,000; Hare Krishnas, 1,500; and the Church of Scientology, 200-300.

A 2008 Catholic University of Leuven report estimated that 7 percent of the Catholic population regularly attends religious services. Fifty-seven percent of the children born in the country are baptized, 26.7 percent of couples opt for a religious marriage, and 61 percent of funerals include religious services.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, conditions were not optimal for groups regarded as "sects" or "cults." The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, government officials continued to have the authority to monitor religious groups.

The country formally joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research after resolving to deal with several funding issues in association with the formation of a new Government in the summer of 2007.

The May 2007 Anti-Discrimination Act outlaws discrimination on the grounds of religion or philosophical orientation, among other grounds.

The Government accords "recognized" status to Catholicism, Protestantism (including evangelicals and Pentecostals), Judaism, Anglicanism (separately from other Protestant groups), Islam, and Orthodox (Greek and Russian) Christianity. Representative bodies for these religious groups receive subsidies from the federal, regional, and local governments. The Government also supports the freedom to participate in secular organizations. These secular humanist groups serve as a seventh recognized philosophical community, and their organizing body, the Central Council of Non-Religious Philosophical Communities of Belgium, receives funds and benefits similar to those accorded other recognized religious groups.

The federal Government and Parliament have responsibility for recognizing religious groups and paying the wages and pensions of ministers of those groups. The federal Government also has jurisdiction over secular humanism. As a result of constitutional reform enacted in 2001, federal authorities devolved responsibility for ensuring religious instruction, financial accountability of religious groups, and religious buildings to other levels of government. For example, while parish operations and the upkeep of churches fall under municipal authorities, the provinces sustain the cost of mosques. At the same time, the Flemish, Francophone, and German-language community governments pay religious teacher salaries and the costs of public broadcasting.

In 2009 the federal Government paid \$137.8 million (€106 million) to the recognized religious groups. This sum included \$18.6 million (€14.3 million) to lay organizations and \$6.8 million (€5.2 million) to Islamic religious groups. For 2008 the federal budget outlays also totaled \$137.8 million (€106 million). The Government appropriated \$123.5 million (€95 million) in 2007. Subsidies to the Buddhist secretariat amounted to \$199,000 (€153,000) in 2009 and to \$195,000 (€150,000) in 2008.

According to the Justice Ministry, the federal Government made salary payments to 2,787 Catholic priests, 122 Protestant/Evangelical and 13 Anglican ministers, 33 rabbis, 47 Orthodox priests, and 285 lay consultants, plus four Muslim imams. The federal and regional authorities continued to deliberate with the Muslim Executive, which is the organizational body elected by the Muslim Executive Council, on the criteria for providing payments to Muslim clerics. In the absence of an agreement, no such payments were made during the reporting period. According to the Inter-University Center for Permanent Education (CIFOP) research institute, total outlays by all levels of government, excluding religious education, amounted to \$312 million (€240.1 million) in 2008. With pensions and tax waivers included, the total subsidy amounted to \$422.5 million (€325 million).

The Government applies five criteria in deciding whether to grant recognition to a religious group: the religion must have a structure or hierarchy; the group must have a sufficient number of members; the religion must have existed in the country for a long period of time; it must offer a social value to the public; and it must abide by the laws of the state and respect public order. These criteria are not listed in decrees or laws, and the Government does not formally define "sufficient," "long period of time," or "social value." A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then conducts a thorough

review before recommending approval or rejection. Final approval of recognized status is the sole responsibility of Parliament; however, Parliament generally accepts the decision of the Ministry of Justice. A group whose application is refused by the Ministry of Justice may appeal the decision to the Council of State.

By the end of the reporting period, the Walloon regional government had recognized 43 mosques. The Flemish regional government had recognized seven mosques, and Brussels had recognized five. All three regional governments were in the process of recognizing additional mosques.

In November 2006 a committee of experts appointed by the Justice Minister made some recommendations for a wholesale amendment of the legislation governing faiths and the financing system. In his 2009 budget message, the Justice Minister explained that the reform would encompass both recognized and non-recognized religions, and deal with anomalies regarding salaries, retirement age, and retirement pay for ministers of the faiths that receive government support. He added that the report of the assigned working group would be ready by October 1, 2010.

The Government agreed to finance an increase in the number of parish assistants for the Catholic Church to better cope with the dwindling number of priests. At the end of the reporting period, the Buddhists reported no progress on recognizing Buddhism as a "nonconfessional philosophical community," as the Buddhist community wanted.

The lack of recognized status does not prevent a religious group from practicing freely and openly. Thus, while unrecognized groups do not qualify for government subsidies, they may qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit organizations.

On February 20, 2009, the Muslim General Council elected a new executive, and the Government conferred recognition and subsidization for another year. In 2007 the Muslim Executive became the subject of a fraud investigation. The Executive's vice president was arrested, and a judicial investigation was started into the financial dealings of the chairman. In October 2007 10 of the 17 members of the Executive failed to win a vote of confidence. After the vote of no-confidence, then Justice Minister Jo Vandeurzen suspended subsidization. On February 22, 2008, the Executive failed to name new members and went into receivership. On March 14, 2008, the Muslim General Council met and elected a new Executive, and appointed Semsettin Urgulu chairman of the Executive. After having submitted a financial plan, the new Executive was recognized as the official interlocutor for the

Muslim community through the Royal Decree of May 9, 2008, which provided recognition and subsidization for one year. In November 2008 a Brussels prosecutor announced that he would seek an embezzlement indictment of Benjelloul Kissi, the former vice president of the Executive.

The Flemish and Francophone regional governments, in association with the Muslim Executive Council, set academic benchmarks for imams at the same level as for ministers of other recognized religious groups.

In 1993 the Government established by law the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Combat (Struggle) against Racism (CEOOCR), an independent agency responsible for addressing through litigation all types of discrimination, including religious. It is formally part of the Office of the Prime Minister and operates under control of the minister in charge of equal opportunity. The board of directors and managing-director are appointed by the government for a renewable six-year term.

In 2006 the Ministry of Justice introduced a mechanism to identify racist, xenophobic, or homophobic offenses, thus making it easier to prosecute discrimination as a criminal act. The Minister decided to appoint a magistrate in each judicial district in charge of monitoring racism and discrimination cases. In addition, the College of Prosecutors General, a government body on which senior prosecutors serve, issued a directive on identifying violations of antiracism and antidiscrimination legislation.

The Government observes the following holidays as national holidays: Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Assumption, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Federal law prohibits public statements that incite national, racial, or religious hatred, including denial of the Holocaust. The maximum sentence for Holocaust denial is one-year's imprisonment.

In 2005 the Center for Equal Opportunity issued a comprehensive report on public symbols of religious and philosophical convictions. The report found that neither the Flemish nor the Francophone educational authorities imposed restrictions, and it was left to individual schoolmasters to decide which symbols would be tolerated. Most schoolmasters in the country imposed a headscarf ban on both pupils and teachers. A survey released in 2006 showed that 90 percent of the non-Catholic schools in the Francophone community did not permit the headscarf. Schools on both sides of the country's linguistic border allowed free days for attending religious festivals. Catholic educational institutions, the largest educational system

in the country, allowed the wearing of religious symbols. Schoolmasters also refused to permit the use of religious objections against attendance in specific courses, notably including physical education classes.

In October 2007 the Council of State ruled that an individual school had overstepped its jurisdiction when it terminated the contract of a religion teacher who was wearing a headscarf outside the school building. According to the Council of State, jurisdiction in this matter belonged to the national public schools authority. In another case, the Antwerp Appellate Court upheld a verdict of a lower court arguing that a headscarf ban is not discriminatory.

Rules on the headscarf are decided by individual schools and municipalities. The federal legislature refrained from taking any legislative initiative regarding the headscarf.

The public educational system, from kindergarten to university, requires strict neutrality of presentation of religious views for teaching personnel, except for teachers of religion. Religious or "moral" instruction is mandatory in public schools and is provided according to the student's religious or nonreligious preference. All public schools provide teachers for each of the six recognized religious groups if a sufficient number of pupils wish to attend. Public school religion teachers are nominated by a committee from their religious group and appointed by the Minister of Education of the concerned community government. Private authorized religious schools that follow the same curriculum as public schools are known as "free" schools. They receive community government subsidies for operating expenses and buildings. Teachers, like other civil servants, are paid by their respective community governments.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. However, government officials continued to have the authority to research and monitor religious groups.

As a result of a 1997 parliamentary committee report, Parliament passed a law establishing two bodies: a group monitoring "harmful sects" and an interagency coordinating group on "harmful sects." The first body, the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN), collects publicly available information on a wide range of religious and philosophical groups,

provides information to the public, and, upon request, gives advice to the authorities on sectarian organizations. Since its inception, the CIAOSN has opened more than 750 files concerning sectarian organizations. The Center's library is open to the public and contains information on religion in general as well as on specific religious groups, including information provided by those groups. The Center has the authority to share with the public any information it collects on religious sects; however, it does not have the authority to provide assessments of individual sectarian organizations to the general public. Despite its name, regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful. Unlike the Anti-Racism Center, this body cannot initiate litigation.

The second body established by Parliament, the Interagency Coordination Group on "harmful sects," deals primarily with confidential material and works with the legal and security institutions of the Government to coordinate government policy. Pursuant to a 2005 Royal Decree, the group's composition was changed to include representatives from the College of Prosecutors General; the Federal Prosecuting Office; the Federal Police; State Security; Defense Intelligence; and the Justice, Interior, Foreign, and Finance Ministries. The Coordinating Group's executive board meets quarterly and reports to the full group. It produces no publicly available reports. The Government designated the federal prosecutor and a magistrate in each of the 27 judicial districts to monitor cases involving sects.

In 2007 members of the Parliamentary Investigatory Committee on Sects (PICS) raised concern about the effectiveness of the Interagency Coordination Group as well as the College of Prosecutors General, which had no official guidelines for prosecuting offenders.

Queries handled by the CIAOSN in 2007-08 concerned physical welfare and therapeutic organizations (15 percent), Protestant denominations (12.5 percent), Oriental religious groups (12 percent), small religious groups (6 percent), New Age groups (5.5 percent), the Church of Scientology (8 percent), Catholic and dissident Catholic organizations (5 percent), and Jehovah's Witnesses (5.5 percent).

In June 2008, at a colloquium on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, the CIAOSN reported on the rapid expansion of neo-Pentecostalism in Belgium and the fact that many of its worshippers relied on faith healing.

On February 29, 2008, confirming a summary trial ruling of 2006, a Brussels court established in a final ruling that CIAOSN had wrongly identified Sahaya Yoga as a dangerous sect in one of its publications. The court argued the advice was not

properly documented and Sahaya Yoga had suffered damage by appearing in the CIAOSN publication. The court ordered the CIAOSN to make public the ruling in its next annual report, post a notice on its website, and inform its annual report readers.

During the reporting period, a number of parliamentarians argued that the CIAOSN failed to meet the goals set at its inception because of inadequate funding.

Created in 2002, the Federal Prosecuting Office continued to hold open several cases involving sectarian organizations that, in a next step, could be forwarded to the Chamber of Indictment. Parliament remained undecided about amending the Criminal Code to include a special section on "offenses committed by sectarian organizations." In the absence of such special legislation, sectarian organizations can be investigated on such grounds as embezzlement, money laundering, abuse of confidence, misappropriation of wills, illegal medical practice, and fraud under existing laws.

On May 12, 2009, the Brussels Chamber of Indictment started hearings in the case against the Scientology Church of Brussels based on an 11-year investigation of the group. The Federal Prosecutor was seeking indictment of 12 persons, the Scientology Church of Brussels, and the Brussels Human Rights Office of the U.S. Church. The defendants filed requests for further neutral investigations, and the judge postponed further hearings to allow these investigations to be completed. The local church and the counsel for the U.S. church maintain that the church is a victim of a climate of intolerance and discrimination created by the courts.

In April 2008 the Federal Prosecutor announced that the country's branch of the Church was the subject of another judicial investigation relating to employment fraud. The Church was charged with recruiting volunteers under the false pretense of a help wanted ad for administrative staff. The Church was raided and closed to members for five weeks during the investigation. This investigation was ongoing.

Libraries throughout the country received gift books published by Scientology on the faith and the life of Ron Hubbard. Most libraries, arguing this was propaganda material from the Church, decided against making these books available for the public. Francophone Education Minister Fadila Laanan issued a directive ordering libraries of Francophone Belgium to remove these books from the shelves.

The case against Luong Minh Dang, personally, not as the founder of Spiritual Human Yoga (SHY), was dropped in 2009 because of the death of the defendant.

On September 26, 2008, the Charleroi First Instance Court acquitted an Aramaic Catholic priest who had instigated religious hatred against Muslims on television in 2002. While admitting that the defendant had used abusive language, the judge argued that religion was not a discriminatory criterion in the then prevailing legislation.

Most public school authorities restricted Muslim girls from wearing the headscarf in school.

In 2007 a few municipalities, including the cities of Antwerp and Ghent, imposed a women's headscarf ban for those municipal employees directly dealing with the public. The measures resulted in acrimonious debates in both cities. Only a few other Flemish cities imposed a ban after the Antwerp and Gent controversy. The Antwerp ban included all religious or political symbols, including headscarves and crucifixes. As a compromise, women employed with the city nurseries were allowed to cover their hair with bandanas.

A Francophone Chamber of the Council of State ruled that the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia (MRAX) had no vested interest in seeking annulment of a headscarf ban in two public schools of the Francophone community. The Chamber opined that the ban enforced by the schools contributed to the goals set by MRAX. Jurisprudence of the past several years shows that judges tend to avoid rulings on the headscarf issue and leave the matter to local schools and governments to settle. Over the past years there has only been litigation against schools enforcing the ban, not against schools allowing headscarves.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

On October 18, 2008, police officers raided a Sikh temple in Vilvoorde, near Brussels during a religious ceremony. Of the 49 worshippers present, 46 were found to have entered the country illegally en route to the United Kingdom. Facing criticism for ignoring religious freedom, the local police chief argued that his force had not been informed in advance about the ceremony and entered the

service as part of a trafficking-in-persons investigation. No members of the local Sikh community were charged.

At the end of the reporting period, there were still no indictments resulting from the April 2008 raid on the Brussels branch of the Church of Scientology, which claims several thousand members. The Scientologists reported that the authorities confiscated the church's records and laptops as well as personal communications equipment, such as laptops and cell phones, from those present and searched them. The office was closed for approximately five weeks during the initial investigation. The Federal Prosecutor's Office said it returned all materials for worship taken for the investigation. The charges were recruiting volunteers under the false pretense of offering employment for administrative staff. The federal prosecutor said the investigation continued at the end of the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In November 2008, only a few weeks after the Vilvoorde incident mentioned above, the King and Queen made a highly symbolic gesture of reconciliation with the Sikh community when, during their official visit to India, they visited several Gurdwaras.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

Jewish and Muslim groups reported incidents of discrimination, as did religious groups that had not been accorded official recognition by the Government.

The Jewish community counted 73 anti-Semitic incidents during 2008, compared to 68 the previous year. There were 62 incidents during the first four months of 2009. The Jewish Community attributed this significant increase to improved data

gathering and to the Israel-Gaza conflict. Most incidents were of an ideological nature and consisted of shouting abuse and of abusive characterizations in the media and on the Internet. The Jewish community registered six cases of physical violence in 2008 and three notable attacks in 2009.

The CEOCR counted 66 anti-Semitic incidents in 2008, compared to 67 the previous year.

The notable events in 2009 occurred the evening of March 3, 2009, in Antwerp when an unidentified man attacked three separate Jewish individuals while shouting "Allahu Akhbar."

On December 29, 2008, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the synagogue of Charleroi. There was limited damage.

On September 14, 2008, a Jewish youth was attacked by a group of men of Northern African descent.

On September 13, 2008, two men with their dogs threatened Jewish children leaving a synagogue in Antwerp. One of the men attacked a Jewish person with a golf club. The police were called and arrested the two assailants.

On September 9, 2008, a Jewish youth was attacked in Uccle (Brussels) as he was using his cell phone to make a call in Hebrew.

On August 23, 2008, a group of Orthodox Jews was pelted with raw eggs in Antwerp as they returned from the synagogue. The perpetrators were of Polish descent.

On November 6, 2008, the media covered a cell phone video showing National Front (FN) president Michel Delacroix singing an anti-Semitic song. As a Member of Parliament, Delacroix was protected by parliamentary immunity but faced a barrage of criticism and was forced to resign as party president.

On December 12, 2008, the Brussels First Instance Court convicted Roeland Raes, a former vice chairman and senator of the far-right Flemish Vlaams Belang party, fining him \$1,300 (€1,000) in damages to the CEOCR and the Forum of Jewish Organizations and ordering a suspended four-month imprisonment sentence for having denied the Holocaust during a 2001 television broadcast. Raes decided to appeal the court ruling.

Federal law prohibits public statements that incite national, racial, or religious hatred, including denial of the Holocaust. The maximum sentence for Holocaust denial is one year's imprisonment.

During the reporting period, several international organizations that monitor anti-Semitic activity reported numerous hurtful and offensive anti-Semitic remarks made by individuals in public places.

During the reporting period, there were numerous instances of hurtful and offensive anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial statements on the radio, Internet, and in books and newspapers.

Some pro-euthanasia activists complained that Catholic hospitals failed to implement the euthanasia act, but a survey concluded that euthanasia was available in most Catholic hospitals.

In 2008 CEOOR received a total of 146 complaints of religious discrimination. These religion-based cases represented 8.3 percent of all complaints; most concerned discrimination against Muslims.

The platform of the Vlaams Belang political party, which won 15.1 percent of the vote in the June 7, 2009, Flemish regional EU parliamentary elections, called for an end of government recognition of Islam as an official religion, the closing of mosques whose leaders preach against Western society, and an end to government subsidies to mosques.

In 2007 a Council of Religious Leaders was created in order to further a dialogue among the leaders of recognized and nonrecognized faiths. The Council was established following consultations within the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP-Belgium). There are also several regional initiatives aimed at promoting religious freedom and tolerance, such as "Bruxelles Esperance," the High Institute for Philosophy of Life, Government, and Society, the Center for Migration and Intercultural Studies of the Antwerp University, and the Canon Triest International Institute of the Brothers of Charity.

Several nongovernmental organizations are active in promoting religious freedom. Among the most prominent are the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia; the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme; Human Rights without Frontiers; and the Liga voor Mensenrechten.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with officials from the Prime Minister's office; the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Social Integration, and Interior; members of Parliament; and regional and local officials.

Embassy officials expressed concern regarding anti-Semitic incidents and urged the Government to intensify its efforts to counter them. Following embassy engagement with both federal and language community officials and supporting the efforts of the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the country formally joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research after resolving to deal with several funding issues in association with the formation of a new Government in the summer of 2007.

The Embassy hosted individual interfaith events to encourage dialogue among citizens and with the U.S. Government. Embassy officials also met with representatives of both recognized and unrecognized religious groups, particularly those that reported some form of discrimination during the reporting period.

BELIZE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 8,867 square miles and a population of 322,000. There is a growing mestizo population (48.7 percent), a diminishing Creole component (24.9 percent), a stable Mayan element (10.6 percent), and a Garifuna component (6.1 percent). The balance of the population (9.7 percent) includes Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and North Americans.

According to the 2000 census, Roman Catholics constitute 49.6 percent of the population; Pentecostals 7.4 percent; Anglicans 5.3 percent; Seventh-day Adventists 5.2 percent; Mennonites 4.1 percent; Baptists and Methodists 3.5 percent each; and Nazarenes 2.6 percent. Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Rastafarians, and Salvation Army members are also present. Catholics are numerous throughout the country and constitute the majority in all but two of the country's six districts, Belize and Cayo, where they are still the largest single religious group. Mennonites and Pentecostals live mostly in the rural areas of the Cayo and Orange Walk districts; members of other groups tend to be concentrated in Belize City.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no state religion; however, the preamble to the Constitution states, "The nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God." A 2002 amendment to the Constitution expanded the appointed Senate to 12 persons, one of whom is appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches. The membership of these organizations includes several Christian denominations, among them Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist.

Under the Constitution, freedom of religion is part of a broader protection--that of freedom of conscience. In addition, the Constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to a person's religion or belief. Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal and rarely occurs. To help maintain religious harmony, the Constitution reserves the right of the Government to intervene in religious matters "for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons," including the right to observe and practice any religion "without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion."

The Government observes Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

There are no special registration requirements or fees for religious organizations, and legal incorporation for a religious group is a simple matter. Property taxes are not levied against churches and other places of worship; however, property taxes are levied against other church-owned buildings occupied on a regular basis, such as the pastor's or priest's residence.

Foreign religious workers are permitted to enter the country and proselytize; however, they must be registered and purchase a religious worker's permit. The yearly fee is modest.

The Constitution stipulates that religious communities may establish "places of education" and states "no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community." Although there is no state religion, the educational system maintains by statute a strong religious curriculum. The curriculum ties "spirituality" with social studies courses. The law provides for students in both public and church-run schools from kindergarten through sixth

grade to receive one class period per week of religious instruction; however, some schools offer religion classes daily. The Constitution prohibits any educational institution from compelling a child to receive religious instruction or attend any religious ceremony or observance, and parents may object to and students may abstain from attending religious observances. This constitutional safeguard is particularly important because most primary and elementary schools, high schools, and colleges are church-affiliated. There are occasional instances where administrators either do not know the law or misapply it. These are usually corrected through parent-school consultations. In rare cases, the Ministry of Education intervenes to correct the situation. Catholic holy days are routinely observed as school holidays.

The Constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without his or her consent while serving in the armed forces or while being detained in prison. The Defense Force retained a Christian chaplain but did not restrict the practice of other religions.

Although the Government has oversight authority over the country's single prison, the institution was managed, and largely financed, by the Kolbe Foundation, a non-denominational Christian non-governmental organization. Missionaries were active in daily programs at the prison, and a chaplain was present on a daily basis. Religious conversion was in no way mandatory, but religious education was part of the primary focus of the prisoner rehabilitation program. After submitting a written request, a prisoner could receive visits from a representative of the religious group of his choice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Government occasionally sought the opinions of a cross section of the religious community in addressing societal problems.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives also discussed religious freedom with leaders of various religious groups.

BENIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,483 square miles and a population of 8.8 million. According to the 2002 census, the population is 27 percent Roman Catholic, 24 percent Muslim, 17 percent practitioners of Voodoo (Vodun), 6 percent adherents of other traditional indigenous beliefs, and 5 percent Celestial Christians. Groups with less than 5 percent each include Methodists, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Rosicrucians, the Unification Church, Eckankar, Baha'is, Baptists, Assemblies of God, and Pentecostals. Seven percent claims no religious affiliation.

Many individuals who identify themselves as Christian or Muslim also practice Voodoo or other traditional local religions.

Nearly all Muslims are Sunni. The few Shi'a Muslims are primarily Middle Eastern expatriates.

There are Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional local religious groups throughout the country. However, Muslims are represented most heavily in the north and southeast, while Christians are prevalent in the south, particularly in Cotonou.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitutional Court determines the legal guidelines that govern religious practice. In recent years the court determined that it is illegal to block the access of any group to its religious premises and that discussion and debate about religious belief is a protected free speech right. The Constitutional Court defined limits to religious speech when it ruled in January 2008 that an evangelical pastor who made scornful statements about a traditional Oro brotherhood violated the constitutional principles of interfaith dialogue, respect, and tolerance.

The Ministry of National Defense is permitted to intervene in conflicts between religious groups as a peacekeeping force to ensure public order and social peace, provided that the intervention complies with the principle of state neutrality in the management of religious affairs.

Persons who wish to form a religious group must register with the Ministry of the Interior. Registration requirements are the same for all religious groups, and there were no reports that any group was refused permission to register or subjected to unusual delays or obstacles in the registration process. Religious groups are exempt from taxation.

Government officials accorded respect to prominent leaders of all religious groups by attending their induction ceremonies, funerals, and other religious celebrations. Police forces provide security for any religious event upon request.

In accordance with article 2 of the Constitution, which provides for a secular state, public schools are not authorized to provide religious instruction; however, religious groups are permitted to establish private schools.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Tabaski, Christmas, and one holiday for indigenous religions. State-operated television featured coverage of the celebration of religious holidays and special events in the lives of prominent religious leaders, including ordination anniversaries and funerals. Ecumenical Day

is celebrated in the historic town of Ouidah every first Wednesday of May and traditionally includes a large celebration of interreligious cooperation. Religious leaders make an effort to bridge the divide between Christians and Muslims and preach a message of tolerance.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Due to the diversity of religious affiliations within families and communities, respect for religious differences was widespread at all levels of society and in all regions. However, there were occasional conflicts that required the intervention of local security forces between Voodoo practitioners and Christians over Voodoo initiation practices.

Interfaith dialogue occurred regularly. In November 2008 the Government organized a National Workshop gathering all religious faith representatives to discuss the country's secular governance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials met with Christian,

Muslim, and Voodoo leaders to discuss interfaith dialogue and the Government's respect for religious freedom.

BHUTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Buddhism is the state's "spiritual heritage," although in the southern areas many citizens openly practice Hinduism.

During the reporting period, the country completed its transition from a hereditary monarchy to a democratic, constitutional monarchy. On July 18, 2008, the Parliament formally adopted the Constitution, originally drafted in 2003 and published in 2005. The Constitution mandates that the King, the Druk Gyalpo, is the "protector of all religions" in the country.

While subtle pressure on non-Buddhists to observe the traditional Drukpa values and some limitations on constructing non-Buddhist religious buildings remained, the Government took steps to improve religious freedom in the country. There were no instances of the Government barring non-Buddhist missionaries from entering the country.

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Societal pressures toward non-Buddhists were reflected in official and unofficial efforts to uphold the "spiritual heritage" (Buddhism) of the country.

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Government; however, there is cordial and ongoing bilateral interaction and the U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 18,146 square miles and a population of 672,000, according to the 2005 census. Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the population practices Drukpa Kagyupa or Nyingmapa Buddhism, both of which are disciplines of Mahayana Buddhism. Approximately one-quarter of the population is ethnic Nepalese and practices Hinduism. Christians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, and nonreligious groups comprise less than one percent of the population.

Ethnic Ngalops, descendants of Tibetan immigrants, comprise the majority of the population in the western and central areas and mostly follow the Drukpa Kargyupa school.

Ethnic Sarchops, descendants of the country's probable original inhabitants, live in the East. Reportedly, some Sarchops practice Buddhism combined with elements of the Bön tradition (Animism) and Hinduism. Several Sarchops held high positions in the Government, the National Assembly, and the court system. The Government supports both Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist monasteries. The royal family practices a combination of Ningmapa and Kagyupa Buddhism, and many citizens believe in the concept of “Kanyin-Zungdrel,” meaning “Kagyupa and Ningmapa as one.”

Bön, the country's animist and shamanistic belief system, revolves around the worship of nature and predates Buddhism. Although Bön priests often officiated and included Bön rituals in Buddhist festivals, very few citizens adhere exclusively to this religious group.

Hindus, mainly in the South, follow the Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Shakta, Ganapathi, Puranic, and Vedic schools. Hindu temples exist in Thimphu and southern areas, and Hindus practice their religious beliefs in small to medium-sized groups.

Christians are present throughout the country in very small numbers. There is reportedly one building dedicated to Christian worship in the South, the only area with a sufficiently large congregation to sustain a church; elsewhere, Christian families and individuals practice their religious beliefs at home. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed the Government discouraged open worship by both large and small gatherings. International Christian relief organizations and Catholic Jesuit priests engaged in education and humanitarian activities.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution was made public in 2005 and formally adopted by the National Assembly on July 18, 2008. The Constitution guarantees religious freedom as a fundamental right. It stipulates, "A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. No person shall be compelled to belong to another faith by means of

coercion or inducement." It also states, "no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics, or other status."

Mahayana Buddhism is the state's "spiritual heritage."

While the Constitution does not restrict the right to convert or proselytize, the Government limited this right in practice by restricting the construction of non-Buddhist religious buildings and the celebration of some non-Buddhist religious festivals.

The National Security Act (NSA) prohibits "words either spoken or written, or by other means whatsoever, that promote or attempt to promote, on grounds of religion, race, language, caste, or community, or on any other ground whatsoever, feelings of enmity or hatred between different religious, racial or language groups or castes and communities." Violating the NSA is punishable by up to three years' imprisonment, although it is not clear that the Government has enforced this provision of the act.

There are no laws against publishing religious material.

An annual government grant finances the country's Monastic Body of 3,500 monks. By statute, 10 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly and two seats on the 11-member Royal Advisory Council are reserved for Buddhist monks out of respect for the country's tradition of Buddhist spiritual oversight. There are no religious stipulations on the remaining seats. Many non-Buddhists work for the Government. The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, with a Hindu priest as a member, also advises on religious matters.

The Marriage Act of 1980, as amended in 1996, addresses questions of family law such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and child custody. Traditionally, Buddhists and Hindus have resolved questions of family law according to their religion; however, this is changing as the country takes steps to strengthen its formal legal system. The country's legal system is based on customary law and Buddhist precepts.

The Government subsidized Buddhist monasteries and shrines and provided aid to approximately one-third of the kingdom's 12,000 monks. The Government committed to providing this support as a result of the 1956 land reform program, which stripped the monastic establishment of wide tracts of fertile land for redistribution among the landless.

The Government observes major Buddhist holy days as national holidays. The King declared one major Hindu festival to be a national holiday, and the royal family participated in it.

NGO representatives living outside the country claimed that only Drukpa Kagyupa and Nyingmapa Buddhist religious teaching was permitted in schools and that Buddhist prayer was compulsory in all government-run schools. The Government contended that there was no religious curriculum in educational institutions in the country. Buddhist teaching was permitted only in monastic schools; religious teaching was forbidden in other schools. Local NGO interlocutors confirmed that although students took part in a prayer session each morning, it was nondenominational and not compulsory.

The Government requires all citizens to wear traditional dress in certain public places such as Buddhist religious buildings, government offices, and schools, and for certain public functions and ceremonies. The law provides for a fine or imprisonment. Some citizens commented that enforcement was arbitrary and sporadic. The Government asserted that this requirement is intended to preserve the country's cultural integrity.

The Government continued issuing new national identity cards to "genuine" citizens. Human rights organizations alleged that large sections of the country's population are deemed ineligible for national identity cards. Persons holding residential permits, marriage certificate cards (those married to citizens), and time-bound certificates were not eligible to receive the new ID card. The Government also indicated that ethnic Nepalese who have family members living in refugee camps in Nepal would be eligible; however, reports suggested that this has not been implemented.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While there remained subtle pressure on non-Buddhists to observe the traditional Drukpa values and some limitations on constructing non-Buddhists religious buildings, the Government took steps to improve religious freedom in the country. There were no instances of the Government barring non-Buddhist missionaries from entering the country.

According to some NGOs, the teaching of Nepali and Sanskrit continues to be banned in Bhutan. The Government indicated that the teaching of any language is

permitted; however, Nepali and Sanskrit are not part of the curriculum in formal schools.

Followers of religious groups other than Buddhism and Hinduism generally were free to worship in private homes, but NGOs alleged that they were prohibited from erecting religious buildings or congregating in public. Some Christian groups reported that religious meetings must be held discreetly, especially in rural areas, for fear of the authorities. They also alleged that the official government record does not allow them to note their religious affiliation as Christianity. The Government denied this.

No new buildings, including places of worship, can be constructed without government licenses. Reports by ethnic Nepalese citizens suggested that this process favored Buddhist temples over Hindu ones. The Government provided financial assistance for the construction of Buddhist temples and shrines and funding for monks and monasteries. NGOs alleged that the Government rarely granted permission to build Hindu temples; the last report of such construction was in the early 1990s, when the Government authorized the construction and renovation of Hindu temples and centers of Sanskrit and Hindu learning and provided state funds to help finance the projects. The Government argued that it was a matter of supply and demand, with demand for Buddhist temples far exceeding that for Hindu temples. The Government stated that it supported numerous Hindu temples in the South, where most Hindus reside, and provided some scholarships for Hindus to study Sanskrit in India.

Certain senior civil servants, regardless of religious identity, are required to take an oath of allegiance to the king, the country, and the people. The oath does not have religious content, but a Buddhist lama administers it. Dissidents alleged that applicants have been asked their religious identity before receiving government services.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In the late 1980s and early 1990s many ethnic Nepalese residents, a majority of them Hindu, were forcibly expelled or voluntarily left as a result of discrimination. The Government claimed they were illegal immigrants with no right to citizenship or residency. Some of those expelled asserted the right of return. While the Government accepted that at least a few hundred have a legitimate claim to citizenship, it has not permitted them to return. Approximately 100,000 persons remained in refugee camps in Eastern Nepal. (For a more detailed discussion, see

the *2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices*.) The Government resettled citizens from other parts of the country on government-owned land in the South vacated by the expelled ethnic Nepalese. Human rights groups maintained that this action prejudiced any possibility of land restoration to returning refugees. The Government contended that this was not its first resettlement program and that in the past it had resettled some ethnic Nepalese citizens from the South to other areas.

Some NGOs claimed that no Hindu temple or Christian church was allowed to be built in the country. Conversions to Christianity take place, but Christians are not allowed to openly pray or to build churches. They are restricted to practice within the confines of their homes.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Societal pressures toward non-Buddhists were reflected in official and unofficial efforts to uphold the "spiritual heritage" (Buddhism) of the country. While there were no reports of the repetition of the excesses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, societal pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms was prevalent.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Government. Informal contacts between the two governments took place frequently. During these exchanges, U.S. officials discussed governmental discrimination against the ethnic Nepalese minority.

Periodically throughout the reporting period, officers from the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi discussed religious freedom with the Government in Thimphu in the context of refugee problems and the Constitution. U.S. officials stressed the importance of constitutional guarantees for religious freedom and the protection of minority populations. The officials also reiterated the importance of finding a

lasting solution for the mostly Hindu refugees in Nepal in order to demonstrate the Government's commitment to religious tolerance.

The U.S. Government also worked to promote religious freedom and other democratic values by sponsoring travel of several citizens to the United States under the International Visitors, Humphrey, and Fulbright programs.

BOLIVIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Under a new Constitution promulgated February 7, 2009, the state is independent from religion, and Roman Catholicism is no longer the official state religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government occasionally criticized religious groups and others that it believed had commented on political matters.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 424,164 square miles and a population of 9.5 million. According to a 2001 survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, 78 percent of the population is Catholic, 16 percent Protestant or evangelical, 3 percent follow other religions of Christian origin, 2.5 percent practice no religion, and less than 0.2 percent claim affiliation with non-Christian faiths, including Islam, the Baha'i Faith, Judaism, Buddhism, and Shinto. Of those who habitually practice their religion, 56.5 percent are Catholic, 36.5 percent Protestant or evangelical, and 7 percent belong to other Christian groups. In urban areas, 80 percent of the population is Catholic, while 14 percent is Protestant or evangelical. In rural areas, 74 percent of the population is Catholic, while 20.5 percent is Protestant or evangelical.

Approximately 55 percent of the population identifies itself as indigenous: 29 percent Quechua, 24 percent Aymara, 1 percent Chiquitano, and 1 percent Guaraní. Several other indigenous groups are present, although none represents more than 0.5 percent of the population. An estimated 30 percent of the population identifies itself as mestizo (of mixed indigenous and European ancestry) and 15 percent as white. Percentages vary significantly based on the definition used and sociopolitical factors. For example, according to a 2009 poll conducted by the

Bolivian Foundation for Multiparty Democracy, as much as 60 percent of the population identifies itself as mestizo.

The indigenous population is higher in rural areas, where the formal Catholic Church tends to be weaker due to a lack of resources and to indigenous cultural resistance to church efforts to replace traditional attitudes with more orthodox Catholic practices and beliefs. For many individuals, identification with Catholicism for centuries has coexisted with attachment to traditional beliefs and rituals, with a focus on the Pachamama or Mother Earth figure, and on Ekeko, a traditional indigenous god of luck, harvests, and general abundance, whose festival is celebrated widely on January 24.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) estimates membership in the Mormon Church at approximately 153,000. Mormons are present throughout the country and have a particularly large presence in Cochabamba, where their temple is one of the largest in the world. The approximately 650-member Jewish community is spread throughout the country and has synagogues in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. There are an estimated 1,000 Muslims, both converts and immigrants. Muslims have cultural centers that also serve as mosques in La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Cochabamba, predominantly for Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims have a small but growing community in La Paz. Korean immigrants have their own Christian church in La Paz and founded a university with evangelical and Presbyterian ties in Santa Cruz. There are Buddhist and Shinto communities throughout the country as well as a substantial Baha'i community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. According to article 4 of the new Constitution promulgated on February 7, 2009, "The state respects and guarantees religious liberty and spiritual beliefs, in accordance with its worldview (cosmovisiones). The state is independent from religion."

Written agreements between the Government and the Catholic Church formalized the Catholic Church's support in areas of education, health, and social welfare. Although the Government provided the Catholic Church with limited financial support, the Church's expenditures to provide these services, which otherwise

would be the responsibility of the Government, significantly exceeded this support. Government and Catholic leaders expected that these written agreements would remain in force at least until the new Constitution had fully entered into force, in 2010, and until current contracts expired.

The Catholic Church exercised a limited degree of political influence through the Catholic Bishops' Conference. In September 2008 prefects (governors) of four eastern states requested that Cardinal Terrazas and other church leaders act as guarantors of negotiations with President Morales. In the past, governments sometimes requested that the Catholic Church arbitrate political disagreements.

The Government observes Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including non-Catholic religious organizations and missionary groups, seeking to acquire legal representation must register with the Governor's Office of their respective departments (state equivalents) to receive authorization. Nonprofit religious organizations and missionary groups must then register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office of the Director of Religion to receive recognition as religious associations; however, the Director's office has no enforcement mechanism. An estimated 380 religious organizations are registered with the Office of the Director of Religion; in 2008 approximately 30 new groups applied for registration. Registered religious organizations receive tax exemptions. A religious organization that fails to submit an annual report to the Director of Religion for two consecutive years is removed from the registry, but the organization is notified prior to removal.

There were no reports that the Government restricted gatherings of nonregistered religious groups, but registration is essential to obtain tax, customs, and other legal benefits. The Ministry may not deny legal recognition to any organization based on its articles of faith and does not charge a fee for registration; however, the procedure typically requires legal assistance and can be time-consuming. Some groups have forgone official registration and operate informally. Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement with the Government for three years that permits them to enjoy judicial standing similar to that of other NGOs and have tax-free status.

Some public schools provide Catholic religious instruction. By law, it is optional and curriculum materials describe it as such. Students face some peer pressure to participate, although this pressure has declined in recent years. Non-Catholic

religious instruction is not available in public schools for students of other religious groups.

The Government did not take an active role in promoting interfaith understanding, although it was represented at interfaith meetings. It worked with Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon organizations on social, health, and educational programs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. President Morales occasionally objected to what he characterized as the Catholic Church espousing an overtly political role in state affairs, referring to the Church as his "enemy." The Government demanded that Cardinal Terrazas and the Catholic Church cease making what it characterized as political statements. On December 11, 2008, the Catholic Bishops' Conference stated that it rejected President Morales' "authoritarianism and abuse of power." On October 23, 2008, in its annual report to the Vatican, the Catholic international charitable organization Aid to the Church in Need cited the country as one where religious persecution occurred, noting the Government's disagreements with the Catholic Church and President Morales' statements identifying the Church as a supporter of domination and oligarchy over five centuries. However, President Morales' comments did not lead to restrictions on religious freedom in practice.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Catholic, and indigenous communities continued to hold interfaith meetings throughout the reporting period. Although some friction existed between supporters of indigenous religious groups and the Catholic Church, this was not perceived by the Church as discrimination.

On April 15, 2009, a bomb exploded at Cardinal Terrazas' official residence, destroying the entryway. The Cardinal was not at home, and no one was injured. The Government denounced the attack. Members of the Government and the opposition blamed each other for the bombing. The motivation for the attack was not clear, although some reports linked it to alleged terrorists seeking to create political discord, especially against the Government.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Chargé d'Affaires and other embassy officials meet regularly with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, principal religious leaders, and the Papal Nuncio.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entity Constitutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska provide for freedom of religion; the Law on Religious Freedom also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities. These and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. Government protection of religious freedom remained unchanged from the previous reporting period; however, local authorities continued to restrict religious freedom of minority religious groups at times.

Societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice persisted. Discrimination against religious minorities occurred in nearly all parts of the country. However, the number of incidents targeting religious symbols, clerics, and property in the three ethnic majority areas decreased. Local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalism through public statements. Religious symbols were often misused for political purposes. Illegally constructed religious objects continued to be a source of tension and conflict.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and leaders from the four traditional religious communities and emerging religious groups as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and reconciliation. The U.S. Embassy supported religious communities in their efforts to acquire permits to build new religious structures. Embassy officials also assisted religious communities regarding restitution of property and supported several exchange, speaking, and cultural programs promoting religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 31,816 square miles and an estimated population of 3.9 million. The country's territory is divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a separate administrative district in Brcko (Brcko District).

According to unofficial estimates from the BiH State Statistics Agency, Muslims constitute 45 percent of the population, Serb Orthodox Christian 36 percent,

Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 1 percent, and other groups including Jews 3 percent. Bosniaks are generally associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serb Orthodox Church. The Jewish community, with approximately 1,000 members, maintains a historic and respected place in society by virtue of centuries of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities.

The degree of religious observance is varied among the traditional religious groups; however, some areas of significantly greater observance exist, particularly in more rural areas. For many persons, religion often serves as a community or ethnic identifier, and religious practice may be confined to significant rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992-95 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which segregated the population into separate ethnoreligious areas. As a result, the majority of Serb Orthodox adherents live in the RS, and the majority of Muslims and Catholics reside in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Muslim and Catholic majority areas remain, with most Catholics living in Herzegovina and most Muslims living in central Bosnia. The Jewish community, like Protestants and most other small religious groups in BiH, has its largest membership in Sarajevo.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. The BiH Law on Religious Freedom provides for freedom of religion, ensures legal status of churches and religious communities, and prohibits any form of discrimination against any religious community. The law also provides the basis for the establishment of relations between the state and religious communities.

The Constitution safeguards the rights of the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats), and by extension the three largest religious communities, by providing for representation of each group in the government and in the armed forces. As a result of the governmental structure created by the Dayton Accords, parliamentary seats and most government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three constituent peoples. These stipulations often result in constitutional discrimination against "others" such as members of religious communities that do not fit neatly into the three constituent groups. During the

reporting period, the European Court of Human Rights made no decisions regarding lawsuits previously filed by members of the Bosnian Jewish and Romani communities to address the discrimination against those considered "others" under the Constitution.

The state-level government does not observe any religious holy days as official holidays, and parliamentarians continued to disagree on a state law on national holidays. Entity and cantonal authorities routinely recognize religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion, with government offices closed on those days. Locally observed holy days include Orthodox Easter and Christmas in the RS, Catholic Easter and Christmas in Herzegovina, and Kurban Bajram (Eid al-Adha) and Ramadan Bajram (Eid al-Fitr) in Sarajevo and central Bosnia. The Federation Labor Law obligates any employer in the Federation to permit an employee four days off in a calendar year for the purpose of religious or traditional needs, two of which will be paid for. The RS law foresees the observance of the following religious holidays: Orthodox Christmas, Catholic Christmas, Kurban Bajram, Ramadan Bajram, Orthodox Good Friday, Orthodox Easter, and Catholic Easter. Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims have the right to excused and paid absences on these days, while those celebrating other religious holidays can choose two days a year for observance of other religious holidays. In practice, no institutions in the RS function during Orthodox holidays, while during Muslim and Catholic holidays, only employees observing the holidays are not expected to come to work.

The BiH Law on Religious Freedom governs religion and the licensing of religious groups, and it provides for the right to freedom of conscience and religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It grants churches and religious communities legal status and allows them concessions that are characteristic of a nongovernmental organization. The law also created a unified register for all religious groups within the Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is responsible for documenting violations of religious freedom.

According to the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may apply to form a new church or religious community through a written application to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry must issue a decision within 30 days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Bosnian Council of Ministers. The law allows minority religious organizations to register legally and operate without unwarranted restrictions.

A 2007 concordat with the Holy See recognizes the public juridical personality of the BiH Catholic Church and grants a number of rights, including the recognition of Catholic holidays. In May 2008 the BiH Presidency ratified a similar agreement with the Serb Orthodox Church. Both the concordat with the Holy See and the agreement with the Serb Orthodox Church accord with the BiH Law on Religious Freedom. On July 29, 2008, the Council of Ministers passed a decision to appoint a mixed commission for implementation of the concordat, consisting of five members from the BiH Government and five members from the Holy See. On February 18, 2009, the commission adopted a program of work and rulebook for work in 2009.

The Law on Religious Freedom reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. The law calls for an official representative of the various religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout BiH. These individuals are employees of the municipality in which they teach but have been accredited by the religious body governing the curriculum. However, the law was not always fully implemented.

Religious education is largely decentralized, as is the education system generally. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with some exceptions, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the municipality's majority religion. Legally, students (or their parents, in the case of primary school students) may choose not to attend the classes. If a sufficient number of students of a minority religious group attend a particular school (20 in the RS, 15 in the Federation), the school must organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to minority students. Minority students are often widely scattered across remote areas, making it difficult to provide classes even when a teacher is available. In the Federation's five Bosniak-majority cantons, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a two-hour-per-week elective course. In cantons with Croat majorities, Croat students attend the elective one-hour-per-week Catholic religion course in primary and middle schools. However, in 13 Catholic schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, parents have an option to choose between the elective one-hour-per-week Catholic religion course and a course in ethics.

In January 2009 the RS Ministry of Education introduced a Culture of Religions course as an experimental subject for all first-year high school students starting the second semester of the 2008-2009 school year. The aim of the subject is to advance understanding of moral values based on society and tolerance.

On August 13, 2008, the Brcko District International Supervisor issued a supervisory order regulating the conduct of religious education and the employment status of teachers of religion in Brcko District public schools. According to the order, teachers of religion may obtain indefinite-term contracts and have the same status, rights, and obligations, including the professional qualification requirements, as any other teacher under Brcko District laws.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedom and posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases local governments made improvements to protect religious freedom; however, respect for religious freedom continued to be limited by selective legal enforcement and the indifference of some government officials, which allowed societal violence and the threat of violence to restrict the ability to worship of adherents of religious groups in areas where they are in the minority. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of vandalism of religious buildings or violence against and harassment of religious officials or believers. Successful prosecutions were extremely rare. Local police frequently alleged that juveniles, intoxicated individuals, or mentally unstable persons were responsible for these attacks.

Lack of uniform protection posed obstacles to safeguarding minority rights. Police forces as well as entity and local governments frequently allowed or encouraged an atmosphere in which violations of religious freedom could take place. In some cases the reluctance of police and prosecutors to aggressively investigate and prosecute crimes against religious minorities remained a major obstacle to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. The appropriation of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes had a negative impact on interreligious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. Authorities of the majority religious or ethnic group often discriminated against those of the minority group in matters related to municipal services, including security and education.

The lines dividing politics, ethnic identity, and religion were often blurred. Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remained powerful and continued to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group. Many political party leaders used religion to strengthen their credibility with voters. Religious leaders exerted influence in government policy

and programs, sometimes to the detriment of nonbelievers or adherents of another religion.

The Baptist Church continued to have problems registering the Alliance of Protestant-Evangelical Churches in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Baptist officials, the Ministry of Justice claimed that the law could not recognize the legal term "alliance."

Religious officials of minority populations in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar complained of discrimination by local authorities regarding the use of religious property, obstructionism in municipal services, and police protection and investigation of harassment and vandalism.

Provisions in the Law on Religious Freedom regarding education were not always fully implemented, particularly in segregated school systems or where there was political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level. Entity, cantonal, and municipal governments gave varying levels of financial support to the four traditional religious communities: Muslim, Serb Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish. Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority.

Students of the majority religious groups and sometimes also of minority religious groups faced pressure from teachers and peers to attend noncompulsory religious instruction, and most did so. Children who were reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates often attended instruction of the majority religion, even if it was not the religion they practiced at home.

There were a number of controversial and highly politicized cases involving the illegal construction of religious buildings or monuments on private or government-owned land. In these cases the buildings or monuments, which had been built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethnoreligious group in that area, created ethnic tensions and impeded the process of reconciliation.

The cases of illegal construction of religious buildings continued at the end of the reporting period. An illegally constructed Serb Orthodox church remained on the land of a Bosniak returnee in the town of Konjevic Polje in the eastern RS, despite the RS Ministry of Urban Planning's 2004 decision that the church should be removed. In 2007 RS and Serb Orthodox Church officials agreed in principle to relocate the church, but the church had not been relocated by the end of the

reporting period. On September 10, 2008, when Serb Orthodox priests accompanied by a police escort visited the illegally constructed church, the elderly owner of the land, protesting the visit, was charged with attacking a police officer. The owner was allegedly holding a pair of scissors, but no police officer claimed to have been injured. The charges were dismissed in April 2009.

The country's four traditional religious communities had extensive claims for restitution of property that the communist government of the former Yugoslavia nationalized after World War II. The Law on Religious Freedom provides religious communities the right to restitution of expropriated property throughout the country "in accordance with the law." In the absence of any state legislation specifically governing restitution, return of former religious properties continued on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of municipal officials, but such actions were usually completed only in favor of the majority group.

In December 2007 Serb representatives in the BiH House of Peoples voted against a draft restitution law, even though it had previously passed in first reading through the BiH House of Representatives chamber in September 2007. On November 18, 2008, the Council of Ministers formed a new Restitution Commission to work on improving the rejected draft law. At the end of the reporting period, the commission had not submitted a revised law for consideration.

Many officials used property restitution cases as a tool of political patronage, rendering religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities. Other unresolved restitution claims were politically and legally complicated. For example, the Serb Orthodox Church continued to seek the return of the building housing the University of Sarajevo's Economic Faculty and compensation for the land on which the state parliament building is located. The Inter-Religious Council reached consensus on the need for the Economic Faculty building to be returned; however, at the end of the reporting period, no agreement had been reached with university or political leaders. Religious communities continued to seek the return of commercial and residential properties in major cities throughout the country.

On February 20, 2009, the Basic Court in Banja Luka ordered the RS and the City of Banja Luka to pay approximately \$42.6 million (64 million KM) in compensation to the BiH Islamic Community for the destruction of 16 mosques during the 1992-95 war. On March 17, 2009, the RS Chief Attorney filed an appeal to the first instance verdict.

On July 31, 2008, the Mostar City Council passed a decision to temporarily return (give rights of use of) six nationalized buildings to the Serb Orthodox Church.

Minority religious communities also encountered difficulty in obtaining permits for new churches and mosques. After numerous attempts, the Catholic Church received an urban permit to build a new church in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Grbavica. However, the Evangelical Church continued to seek a construction permit to build a new church on its downtown property in Mostar. Evangelical Church officials stated that corruption among municipal officials, specifically the Church's refusal to pay a bribe, caused the long administrative delays in issuance.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders did not always take positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The number of incidents aimed at religious symbols, clerics, and property in all three ethnic majority areas decreased, especially compared with the previous reporting period.

There were a number of acts of violence, theft, and vandalism against Islamic religious targets throughout the country. On December 8, 2008, on the eve of Eid al-Fitr, a fire occurred in a mosque in the Bosniak returnee village of Kula, in Gacko, a municipality in southeastern RS. The RS Ministry of the Interior concluded that the fire was not the result of intended arson but rather the result of a faulty electrical installation. Doubting the trustworthiness of the official investigation results, the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina hired its own expert, who claimed (without having inspected the evidence collected by law enforcement officials) that the cause of fire was arson. Regardless of the origin of the fire, the fact that it occurred on the eve of one of the biggest Muslim holidays,

and due to numerous security problems in this area in the past, the incident contributed greatly to the increased feeling of insecurity of returnees in Gacko.

Serb Orthodox sites were also targets of vandalism. On January 6, 2009, on Orthodox Christmas Eve, unidentified persons burned the flag on the Orthodox cathedral in the Federation city of Tuzla. Police conducted an investigation, which continued at the end of the reporting period, and began providing 24-hour protection to the church.

Vandals also targeted Catholic sites. During the week of March 23, 2009, windows in St. Luke Catholic Church in the Sarajevo municipality of Novi Grad were damaged three times. Police arrested a suspect, who admitted that he was responsible for two incidents, but did not file charges against him. The parish priest reported that this was the 16th attack since 2005.

The Jewish community was also a target of vandalism. On February 15, 2009, graffiti equalizing the swastika and Star of David appeared in Sarajevo. On January 7-8, 2009, during the conflict in Gaza, anti-Semitic graffiti was found in Mostar.

Discrimination remained a serious problem throughout the country, especially against non-Serbs in the RS, non-Croats in western Herzegovina, and non-Bosniaks in central Bosnia. Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital, preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city; however, complaints of discrimination, isolation, or marginalization of non-Muslims persisted.

Some individuals preached forms of Islam that tended to be intolerant of other religions and other interpretations of Islam. Debate within the Islamic community continued about how to reconcile these competing interpretations.

The leaders of the four traditional religious communities participated in the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continued to operate despite occasional disagreements and funding constraints.

By the end of April 2009, a controversial Serb Orthodox church built on the site of a destroyed mosque in the eastern RS village of Divic had been completely relocated, without any incidents surrounding the removal.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and leaders from all four traditional religious communities and emerging religious groups in the context of its overall interfaith dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy publicly criticized instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities and buildings and encouraged political leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly. Similarly, embassy officials frequently spoke out against the politicization of religion. The U.S. Government continued its support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic government, in an attempt to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

The Embassy continued to lobby for the adoption of a law on restitution to assist religious communities in obtaining the return of their former property.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy personnel met frequently with the principal leaders of all four major religious groups and hosted or attended religious holiday events including iftars, Catholic and Orthodox Christmas, and Passover. The Embassy worked closely with religious leaders, individually and collectively, to discuss religious freedom concerns and to urge them to nurture interreligious dialogue.

The U.S. Government continued to fund countrywide human rights and democracy courses taught in 50 percent of all Bosnian elementary and secondary schools and all private Bosnian Catholic schools.

To promote interreligious dialogue, the Embassy continued to engage in an active outreach program with religious communities at all levels. This included sponsoring speaking engagements by visiting U.S. academics and lecturers, meeting with faith-based charities, funding English Language Fellows at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences and several madrassahs, helping to establish a comparative religion graduate program between the University of Sarajevo and Arizona State University, and funding several exchange programs to promote religious dialogue, including the "Faith and Community" exchange program that gave 18 of Bosnia's young religious leaders a chance to study comparative religion in the United States. The U.S. Government continued to provide funds to the National Commission to Preserve Monuments via the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation to support the reconstruction of religious property destroyed during the 1992-95 war, including the famous Ferhadija Mosque and Muslim Seranic House in Banja Luka, St. Mary's Catholic Church and St. Luke's bell tower

in Jajce, and the Serb Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Osanici, Stolac.

BOTSWANA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 224,710 square miles and a population of 1.8 million. An estimated 70 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and members of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. The Muslim community, primarily of South Asian origin, numbers slightly more than 5,000. There are small numbers of Hindus and Baha'is. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espouse no religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Although it is common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups occasionally lead non-Christian prayers during such meetings. The Constitution also provides for the protection of the rights and

freedoms of other persons, including the right to observe and practice any religion without unsolicited intervention.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the Government. To register, a group must submit its constitution to the Registrar of Societies section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must be registered before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account in a local bank. Any person who holds an official position in, manages, or assists in the management of an unregistered organization is liable to a fine of up to \$140 (Pula 1,000) and/or up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to \$70 (Pula 500) and/or up to three years in prison.

The registration process normally takes approximately 14 days; it may take longer if an application requires corrections. Applicants must make corrections to their applications within 90 days of being notified of an error on their application. Applications are automatically terminated after failure to make corrections or to submit the required forms, fees, and documents the law mandates. If an application is terminated or rejected, applicants have 28 days to appeal the decision.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

Religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but also addresses other religious groups in the country. The Constitution provides that every religious community may establish places for religious instruction at the community's expense. The Constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, or taking oaths that run counter to an individual's religious beliefs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interest of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health.

However, any suspension of religious freedom by the Government must be deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society" under the Constitution.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Representatives of the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i communities came together in April 2009 to form and register an official interfaith council. The group planned to meet quarterly to discuss religious issues and promote interfaith dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

BRAZIL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3,286,488 square miles and a population of 191.9 million. Nearly all major religious groups are present. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census by the Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identified itself as Roman Catholic. Approximately 17.9 percent of the population is Protestant, an estimated 85 percent of whom are Pentecostal or evangelical, including the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the Quadrangular Gospel, God is Love, Maranata, Brazil for Christ, House of the Blessing, and New Life. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, and Congregationalists account for most of the remaining Protestants and are centered in the south. In the 2000 census, 199,645 residents identified themselves as belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); however, the church lists its current membership at approximately one million.

According to the 2000 census, there are 214,873 Buddhists, 2,905 Hindus, and 151,080 adherents of other eastern religions. Japanese-Brazilians, to a limited extent, practice Shintoism. The census reports 17,088 adherents of indigenous religious beliefs. Members of African and syncretic religious groups such as Candomblé total a reported 127,582, while followers of Umbanda total 397,431.

There are no statistics on the number of followers of Xango or of Macumba; however, the census indicates that members of Afro-Brazilian religious groups total 0.3 percent of the population.

The census reported 25,889 practitioners of Spiritualism. However, according to Fundação Getulio Vargas, a higher education institution considered a "policymaker think-tank," in 2003 followers of Spiritualism, mainly Kardecists--adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century--constituted approximately 1.4 percent of the population. An estimated 5 to 7 percent of the population does not practice any religion.

Reliable figures on the number of Muslims do not exist. The 2000 census reported only 27,239 Muslims. Muslim leaders estimate that there are between 700,000 and 3 million Muslims, with the lower figure representing active practitioners. There are significant Muslim communities in the industrial suburbs of the city of São Paulo and in the port city of Santos, as well as in smaller communities in Paraná State in the coastal region and in Curitiba and Foz do Iguazu in the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay triborder area. The community is overwhelmingly Sunni; the Sunnis are almost completely assimilated into broader society. The recent Shi'ite immigrants gravitate to small insular communities in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants who arrived during the past 25 years from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Conversions to Islam increased during the reporting period among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 60 mosques, Islamic religious centers, and Islamic associations.

According to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil (CONIB), there are more than 120,000 Jews, of whom 65,000 reside in São Paulo State and 40,000 in Rio de Janeiro State. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 5 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Criminal Code (Law 2.848/40), article 208 enforces protection of religious freedom.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups, and there is no favored or state religion. Religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. There is a general provision for access to religious

services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen (Carmo), the Assumption, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Education is mandatory for all children, but parents are free to send their children to the public or private school of their choice. Public schools are required to offer religious instruction, but neither the Constitution nor legislation defines how this should be done. Religious instruction is optional for students. Each school defines the religious curriculum, usually in agreement with parent councils. The law prohibits public subsidies to schools run by religious organizations.

It is illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell books that promote anti-Semitism or racism. The law enables courts to fine or imprison from two to five years anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts anti-Semitic or racist material.

According to a March 7, 2009, article in the *O Estado de São Paulo* newspaper, the Federal Public Ministry in São Paulo requested an injunction prohibiting the broadcast of television programs on the TV Globo, Record, and Gazette channels that offend religious groups of African origin. Violators would be required to pay a daily fine of \$4,200 (10,000 Brazilian Reais) in addition to compensation for collective moral damages of \$5.7 million (13.6 million Brazilian Reais) in the case of the Record and \$1.4 million (3.4 million Brazilian Reais) for the Gazette (equivalent to 1 percent of each station's accounts billable).

In 2008 the municipal government of Salvador, Bahia State demolished a Candomblé temple that had been illegally constructed on public land. The mayor of Salvador publicly apologized, dismissed the official responsible, and rebuilt the temple.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Government restricted access by nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves. Visitors must have permission from the National Indigenous Foundation and an invitation from a member of the indigenous group.

In February 2009 the newspaper *O Globo* reported that the new president of the Court of Justice in Rio de Janeiro, Luiz Zveiter, removed a crucifix from a shared chapel of the Special Body of the court. Zveiter stated that the 25 judges follow different creeds and have the autonomy to retain or remove religious images. Some Catholics believed that the decision should be reviewed and reconsidered. A representative of the Catholic archdiocese affirmed that symbols important to the majority should be approached with care so as not to contribute to religious intolerance.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In January 2009 the Commission Against Religious Intolerance, a non-governmental organization (NGO), published the *Guide to Combat Racism and Religious Intolerance (Freedom Manual)*, written by a former state secretary of human rights, which contains general guidelines for victims of racial or religious discrimination. On January 21, 2009, representatives of various religious groups met in Rio de Janeiro to launch the guide, which explains the implementation of article 20 of Law CAO No. 7437 that provides penalties of up to five years for crimes of racism and religious intolerance. The guide also provides addresses where victims can receive aid. Police distributed the manual to police stations and religious organizations in Rio de Janeiro to advise officers on how to respond to discrimination complaints.

In September 2008 the Rio de Janeiro State Legislature created a religious intolerance hotline number to register cases of discrimination or threats against any religion. The number of religious discrimination complaints registered by the police in Rio de Janeiro State increased during the reporting period. Most of the complaints were from followers of African-based religious groups, such as Candomblé and Umbanda. In Rio de Janeiro, the NGO Legal Project assisted with 15 cases of religious intolerance, most of which targeted believers of religious groups of African origin.

In April 2009 Adriana de Holanda, a Candomblé religious leader in the city of Niterói, opposite Rio de Janeiro, reported that neighbors threatened her because of the religious services held in her house. She also reported verbal and physical violence against her. The Commission Against Religious Intolerance sent the case to the Public Ministry.

In January 2009 a Candomblé priest from northern Rio de Janeiro pressed charges against an evangelical church, alleging that the pastor and church members destroyed offerings (macumba) he left in the street in honor of his deities.

In September 2008 in Salvador, Bahia State, the State Court ordered the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God to compensate family members of Candomblé religious leader Gildásia dos Santos for damages related to the death of dos Santos in 2000.

In March 2009 vandals threw an improvised explosive device at a Pentecostal church in Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais during a Sunday evening service, damaging the building and injuring a parishioner. The case was under investigation at the end of the reporting period.

In March 2009 unknown persons in Pavuna, a district of Rio de Janeiro, broke the windows of the temple of a spiritualist group, injuring one person. Members of the neighboring Baptist church allegedly antagonized the spiritualist group by holding services on its grounds. The spiritualist group decided not to press charges against the Baptist church leaders.

Anti-Semitism was rare; however, there were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, other acts of vandalism, harassment, and threats via telephone and e-mail. Numerous anti-Semitic websites continued to operate. A Jewish lawyer from Rio de Janeiro sued a cast member, known as Vovó Naná, of the popular television program *Big*

Brother Brazil Season 9 for declaring during the show that Jewish people do not believe in God.

The Center for Promoting Islam in Latin America in São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo State, which has a large Shi'ite population, reported frequent complaints of verbal harassment of Muslim women wearing veils in public.

There was no national interfaith movement; however, the National Commission for Religious Dialogue brought together Christian and Jewish religious groups. In 2007 the Protestant-Catholic Group of Dialogue was created. The Group of Ecumenical Reflection and Interreligious Dialogue supported these groups and promoted dialogue at regional and national levels.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

BRUNEI

The Constitution states, "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafi'i sect of that religion: Provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them in any part of Brunei Darussalam." Other laws and policies placed restrictions on religious groups that did not adhere to the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam.

The Government was responsible for deterioration of religious freedom during the reporting period by further restricting religious freedoms for non-Muslims. Non-Muslims were prohibited from receiving religious education in private religious schools, even though this had been previously allowed. Non-Muslims also faced social and, at times, official pressure to conform to Islamic guidelines on behavior. The Government maintained a ban on a number of groups it considered "deviant." Practitioners of non-Muslim religions were not allowed to proselytize, and government policies generally discouraged the population from being exposed to religions besides Islam. Across denominational lines, non-Muslim religious leaders stated that they were subjected to undue influence and duress, and some were threatened with fines and/or imprisonment. Active monitoring of churches and disruption of supply shipments and mail were reported. Laws and regulations generally limited access to religious literature, places of worship, and public religious gatherings for non-Muslims. The Government continued to favor the propagation of Shafi'i beliefs and practices, as well as the Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) belief system, particularly through public events and the education system. Muslims remained subject to the Government's interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law).

The country's various religious groups coexisted peacefully; however, ecumenical interaction was limited due to rulings by religious officials that place religious sanctions against Muslims appearing to support non-Muslim religions by engaging in interfaith dialogue.

The U.S. Government regularly discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador actively promoted religious freedom through discussion with senior government and religious leaders. In addition, the U.S. Embassy repeatedly expressed concerns, verbally and in writing, to senior government officials about the denial of religious rights protected in the constitution. In each approach, the Embassy made clear the United States' commitment to religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 2,200 square miles and a population of 380,000. According to official statistics, the population includes 197,260 Muslims, 16,215 Buddhists, 6,844 Christians, 712 Roman Catholics, 242 Hindus, 72 Baha'is, 34 atheists, 40 Taoists, 33 Sikhs, and seven Nasrani, as well as 53 individuals of other religious groups and 16,916 who did not state a religious preference. The Government categorizes Catholics as distinct from other Christians. There is also an indigenous population that adheres to traditional beliefs, although they often convert either to Islam or Christianity.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states, "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafi'i sect of that religion: Provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them in any part of Brunei Darussalam." Other laws and policies place restrictions on religious groups that do not adhere to the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam.

The Government describes the country as a Malay Islamic Monarchy and actively promotes adherence by its Muslim residents to Islamic values and traditions. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for propagating and reinforcing the Shafi'i beliefs and practices as well as enforcing Shari'a law, which exist alongside secular laws and applies only to Muslims. Islamic authorities organize a range of dakwah or proselytizing activities and incentives to explain and propagate Islam. Among the incentives to converts, especially those from the indigenous communities in rural areas, are monthly financial assistance, new homes, electric generators, and water pumps.

The Societies Order of 2005 requires all organizations, including any non-Shafi'i religious group, to register and provide the names of its members. The application process is overseen by the Registrar of Societies, who exercises discretion over applications and may refuse approval for any reason. Unregistered organizations can face charges of unlawful assembly and be fined. Individuals who participate in or influence others to join unregistered organizations can be fined, arrested, and imprisoned.

There are 101 mosques and Muslim prayer halls, seven Christian churches, three Chinese temples, and one Hindu temple officially registered in the country. The Government continues to enforce zoning laws that prohibit the use of private homes as places of worship. However, there were reports that unregistered religious groups were able to conduct religious observances without interference from the authorities in private residences.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Chinese New Year, Christmas Day, Hari Raya Aidil Fitri (Eid ul-Fitr), Hari Raya Aidil Adha (Eid ul-Adha), First Day of Ramadhan (Ramadan), First Day of the Muharram (Islamic Calendar), Isra Mikraj (Isra Me'raj), the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, and Nuzal Al-Quraan (Revelation of the Quran).

The Government periodically warned the population about "outsiders" preaching radical Islamic fundamentalist or unorthodox beliefs and warned Muslims against Christian evangelists.

A 1964 fatwa issued by the State Mufti strongly discourages Muslims from assisting non-Muslim organizations in propagating their faiths. The Ministry of Religious Affairs reportedly uses the fatwa to influence other government authorities either to deny non-Shafi'i religious organizations permission for a range of religious and administration activities or to fail to respond to applications from these groups. Nonetheless, Christian churches and their associated schools have been allowed, for safety reasons, to repair, expand, and renovate buildings on their sites. However, this process is often lengthy and difficult.

Any public assembly of five or more persons requires official approval in advance, regardless of the purpose of the assembly. Chinese temples have been granted permission from relevant authorities to celebrate seasonal religious events but must reapply for permission annually.

Under the Emergency (Islamic Family Law) Order 1999, Muslim women have similar rights as Muslim men in matters of divorce and child custody. The Government's interpretation of Islamic inheritance law holds that female Muslims' inheritance will be half that of male heirs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government was responsible for deterioration of religious freedom during the reporting period by further restricting religious freedoms for non-Muslims.

Since the early 1990s, the Government has worked to reinforce the legitimacy of the hereditary monarchy and the observance of traditional and Muslim values by promoting a national ideology, known as the Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), or Malay Islamic Monarchy. MIB principles have been adopted as the basis for civic life. During the reporting period, the Government held several public events at the University of Brunei Darussalam to reinforce the importance of preserving the MIB principles, and which were particularly directed at youth in the audience. All government meetings and ceremonies commence with a Muslim prayer. When attending citizenship ceremonies, non-Muslims must wear national dress, including Muslim head coverings for men and women.

Despite constitutional provisions providing for religious freedom, the Government restricted, to varying degrees, the religious practices of all religious groups other than the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam. Proselytizing by any group other than the official Shafi'i sect is prohibited. The Government has banned the importation of religious teaching materials or scriptures, such as the Bible, and refused permission to establish new churches, temples, or shrines. It has also banned several religious groups that it considers deviant, including Al-Arqam, Abdul Razak Mohammad, Al-Ma'unah, Saihoni Taispan, the Baha'i faith, Tariqat Mufarridiyyah, Silat Lintau, and Qadiyaniah.

Anyone who teaches or promotes any "deviant" beliefs or practices in public may be charged under the Islamic Religious Council Act and punished with 3 months' incarceration and a fine of \$1,400 (BND 2,000).

The Government routinely censored magazine articles on other faiths, blacking out or removing photographs of crucifixes and other Christian religious symbols. Government officials also guarded against the distribution and sale of items that feature photographs of such religious symbols.

There were credible reports that agents of the Internal Security Department monitored religious services at Christian churches as well as the activities of senior church leaders and members.

The Government required residents to carry identity cards that state the bearer's ethnicity, which were used in part to determine whether they were Muslim and thus subject to Shari'a. Ethnic Malays were generally assumed to be Muslim. Non-Muslims were not held accountable under Shari'a precepts, and religious authorities checked identity cards for ethnicity when conducting raids against

suspected violators of Shari'a. Visitors to the country were asked to identify their religion on their visa applications, and foreign Muslims were subject to Shari'a precepts; however, many persons did not identify their faith and were not challenged.

Authorities continued to arrest persons for offenses under Shari'a, such as khalwat (close proximity between the sexes) and consumption of alcohol. According to statistics released by religious authorities, during the reporting period there were 54 khalwat cases. Government officials reported that in many cases, khalwat charges were dropped before prosecution due to lack of evidence. Most of those detained for a first offense were fined and released, although in previous reporting periods, some persons were imprisoned for up to four months for repeated offenses. By law, men are liable to a \$634 (BND\$1,000) and women to a \$317 (BND\$500) fine if convicted of khalwat.

Religious authorities regularly participated in raids to confiscate alcoholic beverages and nonhalal meats brought into the country without proper customs clearance. They also monitored restaurants and supermarkets to ensure conformity with halal practices. Restaurants and service employees that served Muslims in daylight hours during the fasting month were fined. Nonhalal restaurants and nonhalal sections in supermarkets were allowed to operate without interference from religious authorities.

The Ministry of Education requires courses on Islam and MIB in all schools that adhere to the state curriculum. Most school textbooks were illustrated to portray Islam as the norm, and women and girls were usually shown wearing the Muslim head covering. There were no depictions of practices of other religions in textbooks. The Ministry of Education prohibited the teaching of other religions and comparative religious studies. Private schools were not required to teach Islam, but many made voluntary Ugama instruction available on an extra-curricular, after-hours basis for their Muslim students. Ugama is an optional six-year education system that teaches Sunni Islam under the Shafi'i school of thought.

In previous reporting periods, one private school was allowed to offer Christian and Islamic instruction during regular school hours. During the reporting period, the Government warned teachers and administrators at Christian schools that they could be fined or imprisoned for teaching non-Muslim religious subjects. As of the end of the reporting period the Government had not revised its position regarding the teaching of non-Islamic religious courses to non-Muslim students.

The Government did not prohibit or restrict parents from providing religious instruction to their children in their own homes.

There is no legal requirement for women to wear head coverings in public; however, social customs were reinforced by religious authorities to encourage Muslim women to wear the tudong, a traditional head covering, and many women did so. In government schools and at institutes of higher learning, Muslim and non-Muslim female students must wear Islamic attire, including a head covering, as a part of their uniform. Male students are expected to wear the songkok (hat) although this is not required in all schools. In previous reporting periods there were some reports that non-Muslim women teachers at public schools were pressured by government officials or colleagues to wear Muslim attire.

Marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is not permitted, and non-Muslims must convert to Islam if they wish to marry a Muslim. Government statistics indicated that there were 369 conversions to Islam during the reporting period. Muslims may legally convert to another religion; however, they often face significant official and societal pressure not to convert. Permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs must be obtained before converting from Islam. During the reporting period, the Ministry sanctioned two renunciations of Islam.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. If parents convert to Islam, there is often family and official pressure for the children to do the same. However, the law states that the conversion of children is not automatic and a person must be at least 14 years old to make such a commitment. In previous reporting periods, there were reports of teenage children who refused to convert to Islam when their parents converted.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In November 2008 the Chinese Tiong Hua Community initiated its first official meeting with the Minister of Religious Affairs at the Islamic Dakwah Center.

Since 2007 the Government has permitted the Iban (indigenous tribe) Brunei Association to celebrate the annual "Hari Gawai," a ritual for giving thanks to the God of Paddy. During the reporting period, senior government officials attended this ceremony for the first time, a fact that was widely reported in the local media.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The country's various religious groups coexist peacefully, although ecumenical interaction was limited by common interpretations of rulings by religious officials that place religious sanctions on Muslims appearing to support non-Muslim religions by engaging in interfaith dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to increase contacts and dialogue with government officials and representatives of all religious groups, including minorities. Embassy representatives continued to encourage the Government to adhere to the spirit of its Constitution and its declarations on human rights. The Embassy promoted religious freedom through discussion with senior government and religious leaders and expressed concern over the increased restrictions on religious freedom to all levels of the public and societal sectors. The Embassy maintains close contact with religious leaders and has made clear the commitment of the Embassy and the U.S. Government to promote religious freedom. In addition, during the reporting period, the Embassy supported religious freedom through the Fulbright exchange program, visits to places of worship, and public discussions on religious freedom issues.

In August 2008 the Embassy supported the visit of the U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The Special Envoy met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the State-Mufti and visited the Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University.

BULGARIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits religious discrimination but designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the "traditional" religion. Laws executing these provisions are ambiguous, giving scope to arbitrary decisions with respect to public practice of religion by unregistered groups.

The Government generally respected the religious freedom of registered religious groups. There were some concerns regarding government registration of religious groups and interference with religious disputes. There were also continuing reports of intolerance from local authorities during the reporting period.

There were ongoing reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance, particularly in the media, of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 42,855 square miles and a population of 7.6 million. The majority of the population, estimated at 85 percent, identifies itself as Orthodox Christian. Muslims comprise the largest minority, estimated at 13 percent. According to the Council of Ministers Religious Confessions Directorate, there are approximately 150,000 evangelical Protestants, up to 30,000 Armenian Christians, and 3,000 Jews. According to a 2005 report of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, only 50 percent of the six million who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians participate in formal religious services. The same survey found that 90 percent of the country's estimated 70,000 Catholics regularly engage in public worship. Approximately 30 percent of Catholics belong to the Byzantine Rite Catholic Church. There are 100 registered religious groups in addition to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC). Orthodox Christianity, Hanafi Sunni Islam, Judaism, and Catholicism are generally understood as holding a historical place in Bulgarian culture.

Some religious minorities were concentrated geographically. The Rhodope Mountains (along the southern border with Greece) are home to many Muslims,

including ethnic Turks, Roma, and "Pomaks" (descendants of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule). Ethnic Turkish and Roma Muslims also live in large numbers in the northeast and along the Black Sea coast. More than half of Roman Catholics are located in the region around Plovdiv. Many members of the small Jewish community live in Sofia, Rousse, and along the Black Sea coast. Protestants are more widely dispersed throughout the country. Areas with large Roma populations tend to have some of the highest percentages of Protestants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws provide the right to practice the religion of one's choice, including studying, discussing, and promulgating one's beliefs. Article 5 of the 2002 Denominations Act allows private religious exercise if members of the religious community are the only persons present and public religious exercise if the exercise is also open to persons not belonging to the respective religious community. The act's ambiguous wording gives rise to arbitrary decisions with respect to public practice of religion by unregistered groups. Article 36 of the act punishes "any person carrying out religious activity in the name of a religion without representational authority." Article 8 of the act allows the courts to punish registered religious organizations for a variety of offenses by banning their activities for up to six months, banning the printing or distribution of publications, or canceling a group's registration. Some concerns remain that the 2002 Denominations Act does not adequately specify the consequences of failure to register.

The Constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity, represented by the BOC, as the traditional religion, and the Government provided financial support to it, as well as to several other religious communities perceived as holding historic places in society. The state budget allocated approximately \$2.4 million (3.3 million leva) for registered religious groups, including the BOC, the Muslim community, the Jewish community, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and Protestant and other groups. Of the total amount, approximately \$2 million (2.8 million leva) was allocated for the BOC, mostly for renovation and maintaining of church property.

The 2002 Denominations Act designates the Metropolitan of Sofia as the patriarch of the BOC. The act requires all religious groups other than the BOC to register in

the Sofia City Court and prohibits any group or person who has broken off from a registered religious group from using the same name or claiming any properties belonging to that group. Religious observers argued that this provision effectively outlawed the Bulgarian Orthodox "Alternative Synod" (a splinter group that disputed the legitimacy of the BOC leadership and claimed the authority to manage church property). Three other Orthodox churches received court registration during the reporting period, but these churches did not dispute the authority or property of the traditional Orthodox Church.

The Council of Ministers' Religious Confessions Directorate, formerly responsible for the registration of religious groups, provides "expert opinions" on registration matters upon request of the court. The Directorate also issues guidance to ensure that national and local authorities comply with national religious freedom legislation. Within its discrete authority, the Directorate was generally responsive to denominations' concerns.

To receive national legal recognition, denominations must apply for official court registration, which was generally granted. All applicants have the right to appeal negative registration decisions to the Court of Appeals. Some local branches of nationally registered denominations continued to experience problems with local authorities who insisted that the branches be registered locally, despite the fact that the 2002 Denominations Act does not require local formal registration of denominations.

The Government observes Orthodox Christmas and Easter as national holidays. In addition, the Government respects the holidays of non-Orthodox religious groups, including Muslim, Catholic, Jewish, Evangelical, and Baha'i, and grants their members nonworking days.

The Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties along religious lines, but there were concerns that some parties exploited religious issues for political purposes.

Military law prohibits religious groups from conducting any activity on military premises and prohibits ministering at any level within the armed forces; however, military personnel may attend religious events outside military property.

For most registered religious groups, there were no restrictions on attendance at religious services or on private religious instruction.

Schools offer an optional religious education course that covers Christianity and Islam. The course examines the historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects of religion and introduces students to the moral values of different religious groups. All officially registered religious groups can request their religious beliefs be included in the course's curriculum. While the Ministry of Education provides the course material for free to students, religious education teachers participating in the program are funded directly from municipal budgets.

A number of religious groups broadcast radio programs: the Orthodox Radio Sion and the Christian Radio Svetlina air via Internet; the Seventh-day Adventists broadcast a daily one-hour program in Bulgarian on their world radio "Voice of Hope"; the Evangelical Trans-World Radio network also broadcasts a daily program in Bulgarian.

The Office of the Chief Mufti also supports summer Qur'anic education courses.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, it did not apply existing laws on religious issues consistently.

On January 22, 2009, the Sofia City Court rejected the Jewish Center Chabad Lubavitch's application for registration. The court consulted with the Religious Confessions Directorate, which cited opposition from the registered Jewish denomination. Article 27 of the Denominations Act requires all nonprofit legal entities seeking to promote an already registered denomination to receive the consent of that denomination. The court stated that the Jewish Center Chabad Lubavitch had violated this provision by operating a synagogue and a kindergarten. Shalom, the administrative organization of Jews in the country, also submitted opinions to the court opposing the registration.

On April 21, 2008, the court registered Mustafa Alish Hadji as Chief Mufti after he was reelected at a Muslim conference convened by more than 1,000 members of the community's local branches. The conference followed competing court decisions, which ultimately reinstated rival Islamic leader Nedim Gendzhev. Gendzhev appealed the 2008 registration, alleging judicial corruption and document forgery. The court decision on this case was pending, as well as another case against him alleging embezzlement of approximately \$582,000 (800,000 leva) when the court temporarily reinstated him to the Chief Mufti's Office.

Some "nontraditional" groups continued to face discrimination and prejudice from local authorities in certain localities, despite obtaining a national registration from the Sofia City Court. Article 19 of the 2002 Denominations Act states that nationally registered religious groups may have local branches. The law requires notification, although some municipalities claimed it requires formal local registration. Some municipal regulations prohibited the distribution of religious literature by groups that were not locally registered. There were renewed reports of enforcement of these local regulations in Burgas, Gabrovo, Plovdiv, and Pleven. On October 8, 2008, the Plovdiv municipal police stopped a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and issued her a warning not to distribute religious literature.

On November 3, 2008, the Burgas Administrative Court rejected a complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses against the Burgas municipality. In April 2008 the municipality sent a letter to all Burgas schools instructing them to alert students to the mobilization of nontraditional religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which the city described as the most prominent and dangerous sects. In the letter, authorities claimed these groups attracted followers through manipulation, offers of money, clothing, and food, as well as free movie screenings. They further maintained that the activities of these groups threatened the unity of the nation and exposed it to religious confrontations. Both Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons reported increased hostility, including public insults and stones thrown at their places of worship, following the distribution of the letter. The court dismissed the case, claiming it was unable to verify that the identity of the claimant (officially registered as Jehovah's Witnesses in Bulgaria) matched that of the Jehovah's Witnesses referred to in the letter. In November 2008 the denomination filed a second complaint, which was pending at the end of the reporting period. In December 2008 a school teacher read the same municipal letter to her class as a warning before the Christmas holidays.

Some local governments restricted certain forms of proselytizing. In March 2008 the Mormons complained to the Ombudsman of reoccurring hostility from local authorities in Pleven and Plovdiv. After submitting repeated reminders of their letter, the Mormons received a formal answer from the Ombudsman in April 2009 that cited the Government's obligations to ensure respect for religious freedom but did not address substantively the specific situation. The Mormons reported a number of incidents in different localities, including Ruse and Varna where the missionaries were banned from engaging in conversations about their religion and distributing materials in public places.

In January 2009 the Religious Confessions Directorate warned the Jehovah's Witnesses of reoccurring complaints against them for engaging minors in religious conversations without their parents' consent. The Jehovah's Witnesses rebutted the accusations, saying their missionaries were entrapped. The group issued internal guidelines explaining the law's prohibition against including minors in religious activities without parental approval.

On March 20, 2009, the Supreme Administrative Prosecution Service issued a ruling stating current city zoning plans did not permit the construction of a second mosque in Sofia. The Service acted on a complaint received by a Member of Parliament alleging illegal financing of the construction project. The Chief Mufti's Office rejected the allegations and complained the construction of an Islamic Center, comprising a complex of buildings for administrative, educational, and religious purposes, had been stalled by the municipal authorities on different procedural grounds since 2002. The Mufti's Office also asserted the land had been rezoned several times during this time, leading to an inexplicable decrease in the area of the titled land and the portion available for construction.

On March 19, 2009, the Burgas municipality overruled its previous decision and banned the construction of a mosque, citing concerns for public peace and order. The municipality had initially allowed the construction in response to the local Muslim community's outcry sparked by the December 2008 demolition of an illegally built mosque. Again in March 2009, the Burgas municipal authorities halted the construction of another mosque in the town, insisting that a separate permit was required for the mosque's minaret.

On February 26, 2009, the Orthodox bishop of Veliko Tarnovo led a protest march and presented a petition to the mayor of Gabrovo signed by 5,000 city residents opposing the construction of a Jehovah's Witnesses prayer house in Gabrovo. The municipal authorities had issued a building permit for the prayer house in January 2009 but stopped the construction in February claiming that the Jehovah's Witnesses illegally had erected a concrete wall at the site. The Jehovah's Witnesses demolished the wall on March 24, 2009, and were awaiting a municipal permit to resume construction at the end of the reporting period.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that local authorities in Varna continued to obstruct their efforts to build a meeting hall. In June 2007, after a long battle, they gained permission to begin construction. However, the mayor ordered a stop to construction in July 2007. On July 16, 2008, the Supreme Administrative Court confirmed the November 2007 decision of the Varna Administrative Court, which

ruled the mayor's order was legal because the construction foreman, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, lacked a legitimate labor contract. All criminal charges against the foreman were ultimately dropped after a series of police interrogations and reported police harassment.

In January 2009 the Burgas Free University expelled a student after she refused to take off her headscarf at an exam. The student had already paid tuition and completed the semester but was required to remove her headscarf in order to take the test. The university cited its internal rules, which prohibit wearing of hats, headscarves, and official uniforms during lectures or exams. In Kurdzhali, a student was refused practical training required for graduation after attending school for four years because of her headscarf.

There were no indications that the Government discriminated against members of any religious group in restitution of properties that were nationalized during the communist period. However, the BOC, Catholic Church, Muslim community, Jewish community, and several Protestant denominations complained a number of their confiscated properties had not been returned.

Despite a decade-old court decision in its favor, the Jewish community was unable to regain possession of a state-run hospital in central Sofia until May 2009, when the Ministry of Health made premises available and the hospital was relocated to another building. Prior to the relocation, the hospital's management had contested in court the Jewish community's ownership over the building. On March 5, 2009, the court terminated the case based on a letter by the Health Ministry confirming the relocation, but the hospital management's appeal of the court decision was pending at the end of the reporting period. This paved the way for Shalom to take physical possession of the building, although its ownership remained contested.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On January 22, 2009, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) issued a ruling on the case filed by the Alternative Orthodox Synod after the 2004 forceful expulsion of its members from their parishes. The ECHR held that the Government had violated the religious rights of the claimants and gave the parties three months to negotiate mutually agreeable compensation. The leadership of the Orthodox Church disputed the ruling and called on the claimants to repent for what it viewed as illegal occupation of church property and false representation of the denomination. The parties did not reach an agreement within the deadline, and the Government appealed the decision before the ECHR's Grand Chamber. On June 5,

2009, the Grand Chamber rejected review of the appeal, and the court gave the parties another three months to settle on the amount of compensation due from the state to the claimants.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Relations between religious groups generally remained civil and tolerant; however, discrimination, harassment, and public intolerance of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem. There were renewed reports of societal discrimination against "nontraditional" religious groups as well as negative and derogatory media stories about such groups. The Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report numerous print and broadcast media stories with negative, derogatory, and sometimes slanderous information about their activities and beliefs.

On June 28, 2009, Mormon missionaries were attacked by a group of agitated youths who were coming back from a soccer game. The youths, reportedly associated with a nationalistic movement, pushed the missionaries to the ground and beat them. Police opened an investigation into the incident.

The Chief Mufti's Office continued to report cases of mosque desecrations. On March 3, 2009, three Molotov cocktails were thrown at the mosque in Varna that had been vandalized with graffiti in May 2008. There were no reports of prosecutions in these incidents, and the Chief Mufti's Office expressed concern that the responsible parties went unpunished.

The extreme nationalist political party Ataka continued to publish anti-Semitic material in its newspaper, on its website, and on its cable television channel Skat.

Protestants asserted heavily Muslim areas with a majority ethnic Turkish population sometimes place restrictions on their worship.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly monitored religious freedom in contacts with government officials, Members of Parliament, clergy and lay leaders of religious communities, and nongovernmental organizations.

Embassy officers met with Orthodox leaders and clergy, senior and local Muslim leaders, religious and lay leaders of the Jewish community, and leaders of numerous Protestant and "nontraditional" denominations. Embassy representatives met with various religious groups and government entities regarding the restitution of Jewish properties and with Muslim leaders regarding Islamic extremism and the Muslim leadership dispute.

BURKINA FASO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, at times community members forced old women falsely accused of being witches to flee their villages.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 106,000 square miles and a population of 14.8 million. The 2006 census stated that 61 percent of the population practices Islam and that the majority of this group is Sunni. The Government also estimated that 19 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs, and 4 percent are members of various Protestant denominations.

Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because the majority of citizens practice indigenous religious beliefs to varying degrees and adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs is often nominal.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians live in the center of the country. Persons practice indigenous religious beliefs throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city, is mostly Muslim. Small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant communities reside in the two largest cities and are more than 90 percent Christian.

There are approximately 63 different ethnic groups. Most are religiously heterogeneous, but the Fulani and Dioula communities are majority Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provide the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The Government observes and enforces these provisions. The country is a secular state. Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religious beliefs are practiced freely without government interference.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Ascension, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. According to Article 45 of the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of \$108 to \$325 (50,000 Communauté Financière Africaine francs to 150,000 CFA francs). The Government gives all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approves their applications. The Government taxes religious groups only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production.

Religious organizations operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities. The Ministry of Security has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they accord with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation.

Missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures, such as zoning regulations, in pursuit of particular activities.

Public schools do not offer religious instruction. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. Although school officials have to submit the names of their directors to the Government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the Government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The Government does not fund religious schools, nor does it require them to pay taxes unless they conduct for-profit activities. The Government reviews the curricula of religious schools to ensure that they offer the full standard academic curriculum; however, it does seek to influence religious curricula.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, at times community members forced old women falsely accused of being witches to flee their villages. The Catholic Church-funded Delwende Center, which houses and feeds women accused of witchcraft, reported several cases. The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, along with religious and other nongovernmental organizations, maintained similar shelters in Ouagadougou.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The Embassy and some Muslim organizations cosponsored workshops and public events to discuss religious pluralism in the United States and promote its continued practice locally. The Embassy also sent one Muslim and one Protestant leader to the United States on an International Visitor Program focusing on religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

BURMA

Highly repressive, authoritarian military regimes have ruled the country since 1962. In May 2008 the Government announced voters had approved a new draft Constitution in a nationwide referendum. Democracy activists and the international community widely criticized the referendum as seriously flawed. The new Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, it also grants broad exceptions that allow the regime to restrict those rights at will. Although authorities generally permitted most adherents of registered religious groups to worship as they choose, the Government imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abused the right to freedom of religion.

There was no change in the Government's limited degree of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Religious activities and organizations were subject to restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The Government continued to monitor meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. The Government continued to systematically restrict efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom. Many of the Buddhist monks arrested in the violent crackdown that followed pro-democracy demonstrations in September 2007, including prominent activist monk U Gambira, remained in prison serving long sentences. The Government also actively promoted Theravada Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of ethnic minorities. Christian and Islamic groups continued to struggle to obtain permission to repair existing places of worship or build new ones. The regime continued to closely monitor Muslim activities. Restrictions on worship for other non-Buddhist minority groups also continued. Although there were no new reports of forced conversions of non-Buddhists, the Government applied pressure on students and lower-income youth to convert to Buddhism. Adherence or conversion to Buddhism is generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior government and military ranks.

During the reporting period, social tensions continued between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities. Widespread prejudice existed against citizens of South Asian origin, many of whom are Muslims. Although official religious discrimination was limited, de facto preferences for Buddhism remained.

The U.S. Government advocated religious freedom with all sectors of society, including government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, scholars,

diplomats of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives offered support to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders and acted as conduits for information exchanges with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders. Since 1999, the U.S. Secretary of State has designated Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government has a wide array of sanctions in place against the country for its violations of human rights. The passage and signing into law in July 2008 of the Tom Lantos Block Burmese Junta Anti-Democratic Efforts (JADE) Act further strengthened these sanctions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 261,970 square miles and a population the International Monetary Fund estimates at 50 million. The majority follow Theravada Buddhism, although in practice popular Burmese Buddhism coexists with astrology, numerology, fortune telling, and veneration of indigenous pre-Buddhist era deities called "nats." Buddhist monks, including novices, number more than 400,000 and depend on the laity for their material needs, including clothing and daily donations of food. The country has a much smaller number of Buddhist nuns. The principal minority religious groups include Christians (primarily Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans, along with several small Protestant denominations), Muslims (mostly Sunni), Hindus, and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions. According to official statistics, almost 90 percent of the population practices Buddhism, 4 percent Christianity, and 4 percent Islam. These statistics almost certainly underestimate the non-Buddhist proportion of the population. Independent scholarly researchers place the Muslim population at between 6 and 10 percent. A tiny Jewish community in Rangoon has a synagogue but no resident rabbi and lacks enough resident believers to constitute a minyan, the quorum needed for certain religious rites.

The country is ethnically diverse, with some correlation between ethnicity and religion. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion among the majority Burman ethnic group and among the Shan, Arakanese, and Mon ethnic minorities in the east, west, and south. Christianity is the dominant religion among the Kachin ethnic group of the north and the Chin and Naga ethnic groups of the west, some of whom also continue to practice traditional indigenous religions. Protestant groups report recent rapid growth among animist communities in Chin State. Christianity is also practiced widely among the Karen and Karenni ethnic

groups of the south and east, although many Karen and Karenni are Buddhist and some Karen are Muslim. Burmese citizens of Indian origin, who are concentrated in major cities and in the south central region, predominantly practice Hinduism, though some ethnic Indians are Christian. Islam is practiced widely in Rakhine State, where it is the dominant religion of the Rohingya minority, and in Rangoon, Irrawaddy, Magwe, and Mandalay Divisions, where some Burmans, Indians, and ethnic Bengalis practice Islam. Chinese ethnic minorities generally practice traditional Chinese religions. Traditional indigenous beliefs are practiced widely among smaller ethnic groups in the highland regions. Practices drawn from those indigenous beliefs persist in popular Buddhist rituals, especially in rural areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Highly authoritarian military regimes have ruled the country since 1962. Since independence in 1948, many of the ethnic minority areas have served as bases for armed resistance against the Government. Although the Government negotiated cease-fire agreements with most armed ethnic groups after 1989, active Shan, Karen, and Karenni insurgencies continued. Successive civilian and military governments have tended to view religious freedom in the context of perceived threats to national unity or central authority.

The current military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has governed without a constitution or legislature since 1988. In May 2008, the Government announced that its draft Constitution had been approved with 92 percent of the vote in a nationwide referendum. According to the Constitution, the SPDC will continue to "exercise state sovereignty" until the Parliament is convened sometime after the scheduled 2010 elections. The law governing the referendum stated that citizens and most ethnic minorities were eligible to vote; however, it excluded members of religious orders and individuals serving prison terms, including political prisoners.

Many diplomatic observers and human rights organizations criticized the lack of fairness and transparency of the referendum and questioned the validity of the results.

The new Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, it also grants broad exceptions that allow the regime to restrict these rights "subject to public order, morality, health, and other provisions of the Constitution." It specifically

recognizes the "special position of Buddhism as the faith practiced by the great majority of citizens," but also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and animism as religions "existing" in the country. It states that the Government shall "render assistance and protect the religions it recognizes."

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. Most adherents of recognized religious groups generally are allowed to worship as they choose; however, the Government imposes restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abuses the right to religious freedom. The Constitution protects the right to seek redress for violations of freedoms but does not specify how such claims will be addressed. Moreover, anti-discrimination laws do not apply to ethnic groups not formally recognized under the 1982 Citizenship Law, such as the stateless Muslim Rohingyas in northern Rakhine State.

In addition, the Constitution forbids the "abuse of religion for political purposes" and asserts that any act that promotes discord may be punishable by law. It bars members of religious orders from running for public office. Burmese law criminalizes the "defamation" of religion for political purposes. The regime commonly employed nonreligious laws to target those involved in religious and political activism, including the Electronic Transactions Act, Immigration Act, and Unlawful Associations Act.

Although the country has no official state religion, successive military and civilian governments have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Theravada Buddhism. In 1961 the Government's push to make Buddhism the state religion failed due to countrywide protests by religious minorities. In practice, the Government continues to show a preference for Theravada Buddhism through official propaganda and state-sponsored activities, including donations to monasteries and pagodas, encouragement of education at Buddhist monastic schools in rural areas, and support for Buddhist missionary activities. Promotions within the military and the civil service are reserved for followers of Buddhism. The Ministry of Religious Affairs includes the powerful Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching).

State-controlled news media frequently depict government officials and their family members paying homage to Buddhist monks; offering donations at pagodas; officiating at ceremonies to open, improve, restore, or maintain pagodas; and organizing ostensibly voluntary "people's donations" of money, food, and uncompensated labor to build or refurbish Buddhist shrines nationwide. State-owned newspapers routinely feature front-page banner slogans quoting from

Buddhist scriptures. The Government has published books of Buddhist religious instruction.

The Government controls the organization and restricts the activities and expression of the Buddhist clergy (Sangha), although some monks have resisted such control. Based on the 1990 Sangha Organization Law, the Government has banned any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. Violations of this ban are punishable by immediate public defrocking and criminal penalties. The nine recognized orders submit to the authority of the State Monk Coordination Committee ("Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee" or SMNC), the members of which are indirectly elected by monks.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana oversees the Government's relations with Buddhist monks and schools. The Government continues to fund two state Sangha universities in Rangoon and Mandalay that train Buddhist monks under the purview of the SMNC. The state-funded International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Rangoon, which opened in 1998, has a stated purpose "to share the country's knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world."

Buddhist doctrine remains part of the state-mandated curriculum in all government-run elementary schools. Students at these schools can opt out of instruction in Buddhism and sometimes do, but all are required to recite a Buddhist prayer daily. Some Muslim students are allowed to leave the classroom during this recitation, but at other schools non-Buddhists are forced to recite the prayer.

Official public holidays include numerous Buddhist holy days, as well as a few Christian, Hindu, and Islamic religious holidays. The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Full Moon Day of Tabaung, the four-day Thingyan (water festival), Buddhist New Year's Day, the Full Moon Day of Kason, the Full Moon Day of Waso, the Full Moon Day of Thadinkyut, the Full Moon Day of Tazaungmone, Christmas, Idul Alhwaha, and Deepa Vali.

Since the 1960s, Christian and Islamic groups have had difficulty importing religious literature. All publications, religious and secular, remain subject to control and censorship. It is illegal to import translations of the Bible in indigenous languages. Officials have occasionally allowed local printing or photocopying of limited quantities of religious materials, including the Qur'an

(with the notation that they are for private use only) in indigenous languages without prior approval by government censors.

Virtually all organizations, religious or not, must register with the Government. Religious organizations register with the Ministry of Home Affairs with an endorsement from the Ministry for Religious Affairs. A government directive exempts "genuine" religious organizations from official registration; however, in practice, only registered organizations can buy or sell property or open bank accounts. Due to these requirements, most religious organizations seek registration. Leaders of registered religious groups also have more freedom to travel than those of unregistered organizations.

The Government discouraged proselytizing by non-Buddhist clergy. These restrictions most affected missionary religions, including some Christian denominations and Islam. The Government generally has not allowed permanent foreign religious missions to operate in the country since the mid-1960s, when it expelled nearly all foreign missionaries and nationalized almost all private schools and hospitals. The Government is not known to have paid any compensation in connection with these extensive confiscations.

Citizens and permanent residents were required to carry government-issued National Registration Cards (NRCs) that often indicated religious affiliation and ethnicity. There appeared to be no consistent criteria governing whether a person's religion was indicated on the identification card. Citizens also were required to indicate their religion on certain official application forms for documents such as passports, although passports themselves did not indicate the bearer's religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government selectively enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. During the reporting period, the SPDC continued to rule by decree and was not bound by any constitutional or statutory provision concerning discrimination based on religion, race, gender, disability, language, or social status. Religious activities and organizations were subject to restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The Government's pervasive internal security apparatus imposed de facto restrictions on collective and individual worship through infiltration and monitoring of meetings and activities of virtually all organizations. The Government subjected all media, including religious publications, and on occasion sermons, to control and censorship. The Government at times interfered with the meetings of religious groups.

According to state-owned media reports, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a government-sponsored mass organization in which participation often is compulsory, organized courses on Buddhist culture that millions of people attended. It was not possible to verify this claim independently.

Churches in Chin State often needed to request permission to hold religious ceremonies two to three months in advance, although authorities generally approved these requests.

Authorities frequently refused to approve requests for gatherings to celebrate traditional Christian and Islamic holidays and restricted the number of Muslims who could gather in one place. For instance, in satellite towns surrounding Rangoon, Muslims were only allowed to gather for worship and religious training during major Muslim holidays.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of minority religious groups, restricting educational activities, proselytizing, and restoration or construction of churches and mosques.

Government authorities continued to prohibit Christian clergy from proselytizing in some areas. Christian groups reported that several times during the reporting period local authorities denied applications for residency permits for known Christian ministers attempting to move to a new township. The groups indicated this was not a widespread practice but depended on the individual community and local authority. In some instances, local authorities reportedly confiscated NRCs of new converts to Christianity. Nonetheless, Christian groups reported that church membership grew, even in predominantly Buddhist regions.

State censorship authorities continued to enforce special restrictions on local publication of the Bible, Qur'an, and other Christian and Islamic texts. The most onerous restriction was a list of more than 100 prohibited words the censors would not allow in Christian or Islamic literature, forbidden as "indigenous terms" or derived from the Pali language long used in Buddhist literature. Some Christian and Islamic groups in the country have used these words since the colonial period. Organizations that translate and publish non-Buddhist religious texts appealed the restrictions. In addition, censors sometimes objected to passages of the Bible's Old Testament and the Qur'an that they interpreted as endorsing violence against nonbelievers. There have been no reports of arrests or prosecutions for possession of any religious literature in recent years.

Authorities restricted the quantity of Bibles and Qur'ans imported into the country. Individuals continued to carry Bibles and Qur'ans into the country in small quantities for personal use. There were no reports that authorities intercepted or confiscated Qur'ans at border entry points.

Some Christian theological seminaries and Bible schools continued to operate, along with several Islamic madrassahs. Some of these institutions did not register with the Myanmar Council of Churches but were able to conduct affairs without government interference. The Government allowed some members of foreign religious groups to enter the country to provide humanitarian assistance, as it had done after Cyclone Nargis in May 2008.

Some Muslims paid large bribes to receive NRCs and passports. Authorities often refused to issue NRCs to Muslims who claimed to belong to one of the country's recognized indigenous ethnic groups, such as the Shan or Karen.

Muslims across the country, as well as some ethnic minority groups such as Chinese and Indians, often were required to obtain permission in advance from the township authorities to leave their hometowns. Authorities generally did not grant permission to Rohingya or Muslim Rakhine to travel for any purpose; however, permission was sometimes obtained through bribery. Non-Rakhine Muslims were granted more freedom to travel. Muslims residing in Rangoon could visit beach resort areas in Thandwe, Rakhine State, but could not return to Rangoon without the signature of the Regional Military Commander. Some were able to bribe local officials to allow them to return. Muslims residing outside Rakhine State often were barred from return travel to their homes if they visited other parts of Rakhine State.

Authorities did not allow Muslim government employees, including village headmen, to grow beards and dismissed some who already had beards.

Muslims in Rakhine State, particularly those of the Rohingya minority group, continued to experience the severest forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. The Government denied citizenship status to Rohingyas because their ancestors allegedly did not reside in the country at the start of British colonial rule, as the country's citizenship law requires. The Rohingya asserted that their presence in the area predates the British arrival by several centuries. In November 2008, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urged the Government to review its 1982 Citizenship Law. After

completing missions to the country in August 2008 and February 2009, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar specifically noted the Rohingya in his call for the Government to repeal discriminatory legislation and practices. Many of the approximately 21,000 Rohingya Muslims registered in two refugee camps in Bangladesh and the approximately 200,000 Rohingya Muslims living outside those refugee camps refused to return to the country because they feared human rights abuses, including religious persecution.

Rohingya Muslims were not eligible for NRCs. Although essentially treated as illegal foreigners, they were not issued Foreigner Registration Cards (FRCs). Instead, the Government continued a program with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that issued Temporary Registration Cards (TRCs) to stateless persons in northern Rakhine State, the majority of them Rohingyas. At the end of the reporting period, the UNHCR estimated that approximately 385,000 stateless persons over the age of 10 possessed TRCs. Authorities insisted that Muslim men applying for TRCs submit photos without beards. From March 7-12, 2009, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited the country, including Rakhine State, and pledged to expand the organization's efforts to meet current humanitarian needs.

Without citizenship status, Rohingyas did not have access to secondary education in state-run schools because the Government reserved secondary education for citizens. Muslim students from Rakhine State who completed high school were not permitted to travel outside the state to attend college or university. Authorities continued to bar graduation of Muslim university students who did not possess NRCs. These students were permitted to attend classes and sit for examinations, but they could not receive diplomas because they did not have NRCs, which they could not obtain unless they claimed a "foreign" ethnic minority affiliation. Rohingyas were also unable to obtain employment in any civil service positions.

In 2006 a prominent Muslim religious organization asked the Rakhine State Peace and Development Council Chairman, the Regional Military Commander, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to lift marriage restrictions for Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State. At the end of the reporting period, they had not yet received a response.

Some Muslims also had difficulty obtaining birth certificates. A local official in Sittwe, Rakhine State, reportedly issued a verbal order in 2005 prohibiting the issuance of birth certificates to Muslim babies born in the area. In Rangoon, Muslims usually obtained birth certificates for newborns, but local authorities

refused to allow parents to record the names of the babies on their household registers. Rohingya Muslims who returned to Rakhine State faced difficulty when attempting to register births of their children.

There are still original-resident Muslims living in Thandwe, Rakhine State, but newcomers who are Muslim are not allowed to buy property or reside in the township. Authorities do not permit Muslims to live in Gwa or Taungup.

The Government allowed members of all religious groups to establish and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries and to travel abroad for religious purposes, subject to the country's restrictive passport and visa issuance practices, foreign exchange controls, and government monitoring, which extended to all international activities by all citizens regardless of religion. The Government sometimes expedited its burdensome passport issuance procedures for Muslims making the Hajj or Buddhists going on pilgrimage to Bodhgaya, India, although it limited the number of pilgrims. An estimated 2,000 Muslims went on the Hajj in 2008, 500 fewer than in 2007. More than 1,000 Buddhists made pilgrimages to Bodhgaya in 2008.

Non-Buddhists continued to experience employment discrimination at upper levels of the public sector. Few have ever been promoted to the level of director general or higher. There is no stated policy of religious exclusion or discrimination within the Burmese military, but there were no non-Buddhists who held senior positions in the armed forces, although a few Christians reportedly achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel. The Central Executive Committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the largest opposition group, did not include non-Buddhists either, although there is widespread support for the NLD among most religious groups. The Government discouraged Muslims from enlisting in the military, and Christian or Muslim military officers who aspired to promotion beyond the rank of major were encouraged by their superiors to convert to Buddhism. Some Muslims who wished to join the military reportedly had to list "Buddhist" as their religion on their applications, although they were not required to convert.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has stipulated in the past that permission to construct or repair religious buildings "depends upon the population of the location;" however, there appeared to be no correlation between the construction of pagodas and the demand for additional places of Buddhist worship. The Government openly supports Buddhist seminaries and permits them to construct large campuses. Buddhist groups generally have not experienced difficulty in

obtaining permission to build new pagodas, monasteries, or community religious halls.

In most regions, Christian and Islamic groups that sought to build small places of worship on side streets or other inconspicuous locations were able to do so only with informal approval from local authorities. When local authorities or conditions changed, approvals have been rescinded and, in some cases, authorities have demolished existing religious buildings. Formal requests encountered long delays, generally were denied, and even when approved could subsequently be reversed by a more senior authority.

Christian groups continued to have trouble obtaining permission to buy land or build new churches in most regions. In some cases authorities refused because they claimed the churches did not possess proper property deeds, but access to official land title was extremely difficult due to the country's complex land law and government titles to most land. In some areas, permission to repair existing places of worship was easier to acquire. In Chin State, authorities have not granted permission to build a new church since 2003.

In February 2009 authorities in Kachin State halted the construction of a Christian orphanage supported by the Shatapru Baptist Church in Myitkyina because it had not obtained official permission for the building, according to media reports. Church sources told the press that they had asked for permission but proceeded with construction since there were no official procedures or guidelines to obtain permission.

It remained extremely difficult for Muslims to acquire permission to build new or repair existing mosques, although internal renovations were allowed in some cases. Historic mosques in Mawlamyine, Mon State and Sittwe, Rakhine State, as well as other areas, continued to deteriorate because authorities would not allow routine maintenance. A number of restrictions are in place on the construction or renovation of mosques and religious schools in northern Rakhine State. In some parts of Rakhine State, authorities cordoned off mosques and forbade Muslims to worship in them. The Government's border security forces continued to conduct arbitrary "inspections" of mosques in northern Rakhine State, demanding that mosque officials show permits to operate the mosques. In some cases, when mosque officials could not produce the permits, officials reportedly ordered congregation members to destroy the mosques.

In the wake of Cyclone Nargis, authorities permitted the caretaker of Rangoon's only synagogue to repair storm damage and restore other parts of the building.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued its efforts to control the Buddhist clergy (Sangha). It tried Sangha members for "activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism" and imposed on the Sangha a code of conduct enforced by criminal penalties. The Government did not hesitate to arrest and imprison lower-level Buddhist monks who opposed the Government. In prison, monks were defrocked and treated as laypersons. In general, they were not allowed to shave their heads and were not given food compatible with the monastic code. Like other political prisoners, they were often beaten and forced to do hard labor.

The Government also subjected the Sangha to special restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Members of the Sangha were not allowed to preach sermons pertaining to politics. Religious lectures could not contain any words, phrases, or stories reflecting political views. The regime told Sangha members to distance themselves from politics, political parties, or members of political parties. The Government prohibited any organization of the Sangha other than the nine monastic orders that fall under the authority of the State Clergy Coordination Committee. The Government prohibited all clergy from being members of any political party.

According to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPP), at the end of the reporting period approximately 200 monks were imprisoned, many of them arrested after the September 2007 peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations. During the reporting period, the Government transferred some of the monks, as well as other political prisoners, to remote jails away from their family members, limiting their access to basic necessities and medicines that visiting relatives generally provide.

The Government took no action to investigate or punish those responsible for extrajudicial killings of at least 30 persons during the regime's violent suppression of September 2007 demonstrations. The Government did not investigate reports that security forces took large numbers of residents and monks from their homes and monasteries during numerous nighttime raids following the protests.

AAPP-Burma estimated that security forces raided at least 52 monasteries between September 26 and December 31, 2007, in retaliation for the monk-led

demonstrations. Opposition activists and members of the clergy reported soldiers forcibly entered the monasteries at night and deployed tear gas, fired rubber bullets, and beat monks with batons and bamboo sticks. International NGOs estimated that at least 150 monks were arrested between September and October 2007.

On April 22, 2009, authorities arrested NLD members U Chit Phay and U Aung Soe Wai from Twuntay Township at their homes after the two had led a prayer meeting for the release of activist leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Similar to the well-known Tuesday Prayer Group that meets weekly at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda, a group of about 50 NLD members had convened to pray April 21 at a pagoda in Zee Phyu Gone village. Shortly thereafter, officials charged both men under Section 295a of the Penal Code, which prohibits acts and speech intended to offend religious beliefs. The charge carries a prison sentence of up to two years.

In March 2009 U Gambira's brother and brother-in-law, Aung Ko Ko Lwin and Moe Htet Hylan, were sentenced to five years' imprisonment with hard labor under the Immigration Act. Authorities arrested them after they allegedly made plans to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the formation of the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA), in which U Gambira reportedly played a leading role.

On February 20, 2009, state media announced a general amnesty for more than 6,313 prisoners, including several monks. Among the prisoners released were seven Rangoon monks arrested in 2003 for refusing to accept alms from then-Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. AAPP-Burma also confirmed the release of U Kaythara (also known as U Kyaw Min Thet), U Ingura (U Aye Tun Thar), U Thireina (U Kyaw Moe), U Marlaina (U Min Zaw Aung), U Ardatesa (U Aung Ko), U Takekanateya (U Maung Zaw), U Damitika (U Tun Tun), U Nandathiri (U Htay Ye Tun), and U Sandima (U Zaw Min Htet). Authorities also freed Daw Ponena Mee, at 80 years old, the oldest imprisoned nun.

Human rights observers believed the leader of Maggin Monastery, Sayada Aindakaat, remained in detention, as well as other monks arrested in 2007, including U Sanda Wara.

On January 28, 2009, prison officials reportedly ordered an inmate to beat monk U Kelatha at Henzada Prison, Irrawaddy Division, for wearing his prison uniform in the style of monk robes. Authorities had arrested U Kelatha after the September 2007 demonstrations and sentenced him to 35 years in prison.

On January 22, 2009, monk U Arnanda of Thita Tharaphu Monastery, North Okkalapa Township, died in Insein Prison of unknown causes. He was 61 years old.

On January 17, 2009, authorities transferred U Gambira from Mandalay Obo Prison to Hkamti Prison in Sagaing Division, about 1,200 miles north of Rangoon. U Gambira reportedly staged a hunger strike the week before. On November 21, 2008, authorities convicted U Gambira of several charges, including offenses under the Electronics Transactions Act, Immigration Act, and Unlawful Associations Act. Officials sentenced him to 68 years in prison. U Gambira and his brother were held without charge until January 2008. Authorities arrested him on November 5, 2007, and his younger brother Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw on October 17, 2007.

In January 2009 it was widely reported that authorities threatened some Christian house churches in Rangoon with closure if they did not halt regular services. Authorities also forced leaders of those house churches to sign pledges that they would cease worship. At least eight house churches were closed in Rangoon. According to foreign press reports, Muslim clergy in Rangoon were likewise told to stop worship services and readings of the Qur'an at gatherings in private homes.

In November 2008 the Government handed down sentences to several activists, including monks. According to Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP), authorities sentenced U Thadamma to two years' imprisonment for alleged participation in the 2007 pro-democracy protests. In addition, authorities sentenced six unnamed monks from Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery to 11 and a half years in prison. During the crackdown that followed the demonstrations, security forces conducted a pre-dawn raid at the Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery in Rangoon and removed an estimated 70 monks. Journalists and foreign diplomatic representatives visited Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery in Rangoon and found bamboo batons, riot control munitions, broken windows, and pools of blood on the floor of the monastery's dormitory.

Also in November 2008 the international and exile press reported that nine Muslim activists were sentenced in Rakhine State. These arrests have not been confirmed.

In the weeks before the 2008 anniversary of the September 2007 protests and crackdown, security forces temporarily occupied some monasteries in the cities of Rangoon and Mandalay and in Rakhine State that were suspected of involvement in pro-democracy activities.

In September 2008 on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the 2007 protests, state media reported that the State Monk Coordination Committee issued a directive to all monasteries and colleges in Chauk, Magwe Division, warning monks not to participate in political activities.

AAPP reported that on September 5, 2008, authorities raided Marlayon monastery. In the early morning, 20 persons allegedly entered the monastery, ordered monks to lie on the floor, searched the buildings, and removed the abbot. A few days later the abbot publicly denied the account.

On August 23, 2008, authorities arrested monks U Damathara and U Nandara, both from the Thardu monastery in Rangoon. Officials did not acknowledge their arrests, although human rights observers believed they may have been detained as a precaution against future protests. They likely remained in custody.

In August 2008 the State Monk Coordination Committee publicly reminded monks of a 2006 directive that banned monks in Rangoon Division from leaving their monasteries between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. According to sources, authorities did not strictly enforce this policy.

In August 2008 authorities sentenced nine monks to two years' imprisonment for "the deliberate and malicious...outraging of religious feelings." On July 15, 2008, police arrested the monks at Rangoon Central Railway Station.

On March 30, 2008 the army arrested 11 Muslim community leaders in Maungdaw, Rakhine State. Among those arrested were the president of the Maungdaw District Myanmar Muslim League, U Than Tun (aka Muhammad Solin), community leader Dr. Tun Aung, and local businessman, U Niramad. While authorities did not provide any explanation for the arrests, local residents reported to the media they believed the arrests were the result of the regime's paranoia about alleged organized Muslim political activity in the area. It was believed that the 11 leaders continued to be held at the end of the reporting period, although no information on their condition has been released.

In October 2007 authorities detained approximately 90 monks, including the head monk of the Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery, at a monastery in the Kaba Aye monastery complex, where authorities interrogated them. Many novices had departed earlier to avoid arrest, and parents had retrieved other novices.

On September 26, 2007, soldiers and police raided at least six large monasteries in Rangoon and arrested an estimated 100 monks, including Sayada Aindakaat, the leader of Maggin Monastery.

Beginning in 2004 and continuing through the reporting period, a group of Buddhist laypersons known as the Tuesday Prayer Group attempted to gather every Tuesday at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Authorities sometimes used the pro-regime USDA to block the group from entering the pagoda grounds and make them pray outside the entrance or to shout and clap to drown out their prayers.

On the morning of October 12, 2007, authorities briefly detained Tuesday Prayer Group leader Naw Ohn Hla. Authorities released her later that day but confined her to her Rangoon neighborhood for one year, preventing her from leading the Tuesday Prayer Group.

In January 2007 USDA members verbally and physically attacked Naw Ohn Hla and the Tuesday Prayer Group as they tried to enter Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda. Witnesses reported that approximately 100 men in plain clothes surrounded Naw Ohn Hla and demanded that she and the other members immediately depart. When they refused, witnesses reported that USDA members beat several of the Prayer Group members. Uniformed police at the scene did not attempt to stop the attack, and authorities did not investigate the incident or pursue a complaint Naw Ohn Hla filed.

In July 2006 authorities from Thandwe, Rakhine State, arrested Abbot Wila Tha and his assistant, Than Kakesa, from the Buddhist monastery of U Shwe Maw village, Taungup Township, closed the monastery, and forced 59 monks and novices to leave. Local sources claimed the reason for the arrest was that the abbot refused to accept donations from or conduct religious ceremonies for the authorities. Authorities claimed that the abbot was endangering local stability by talking to monks and novices about democracy, that he was a supporter of the NLD, and that he had supported the visit of Aung San Suu Kyi several years earlier.

There continued to be credible reports from various regions of the country that government officials compelled persons, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, especially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or materials to state-sponsored projects to build, renovate, or maintain Buddhist religious shrines or monuments.

The Government denied that it used coercion and called these contributions "voluntary donations" consistent with Buddhist ideas of earning merit.

Forced Religious Conversion

Although authorities appear to have moved away from a campaign of forced conversion, there continued to be evidence that other means were being used to entice non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism. Authorities pressured Christian Chin to attend Buddhist seminaries and monasteries and encouraged them to convert to Buddhism. Christian Chin reported that local authorities operated a high school that only Buddhist students could attend and promised government jobs to the graduates. Christians had to convert to Buddhism to attend the school. An exile Chin human rights group claimed local government officials placed the children of Chin Christians in Buddhist monasteries, where they were given religious instruction and converted to Buddhism without their parents' knowledge or consent. Reports suggested that the Government also sought to induce members of the Naga ethnic group in Sagaing Division to convert to Buddhism through similar means.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of U.S. minor citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Preferential treatment for Buddhists and widespread prejudice against ethnic South Asians, particularly ethnic Rohingya Muslims, were key sources of social tensions between the Buddhist majority and Christian and Muslim minorities. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

The Government tightly controlled the limited number of private academic institutions and their curricula. Similar controls extended to Buddhist monastery-based schools, Christian seminaries, and Muslim madrassahs. During the reporting period, the Government cracked down on private tutoring and attempted to ban the practice. Aung Pe, a private teacher and NLD supporter, remained in prison, reportedly in poor health, and was serving a three year sentence for an alleged violation in 2005 of the Private Tuition Act.

Since 1994, when Buddhist members split from the Karen National Union (KNU) to organize the pro-government Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), there

have been armed conflicts between the DKBA and the predominantly Christian anti-government KNU. Although the DKBA reportedly includes some Christians and there are many Buddhists in the KNU, the armed conflict between the two Karen groups has had strong religious overtones. There were also unverified reports DKBA members continued to expel villagers who converted to Christianity.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement, including diplomatic travel, made it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in the country, including freedom of religion. Information about abuses often becomes available only months or years after events and it frequently is difficult or impossible to verify.

The U.S. Government continued to promote religious freedom in its contact with all sectors of society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. Embassy officials discussed the importance of improving religious freedom with government and military authorities, private citizens, scholars, representatives of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives met regularly with leaders of Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious groups, including ethnic minority religious leaders, members of the faculties of schools of theology, and other religiously affiliated organizations and NGOs. These meetings included regular invitations to the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires' residence to build understanding and tolerance among the groups.

Through outreach and travel, when not blocked by regime officials, Embassy representatives offered support to local NGOs and religious leaders and exchanged information with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders. Members of many of Burma's ethnic groups and religions participated in English language and current events studies at the Embassy's American Center. The American Center regularly translated statements and reports by the U.S. Government and NGOs on violations of religious freedom in the country and distributed them via its frequently visited library. The U.S. Government continued to support the UNHCR effort to work with the Ministry of Immigration and Population to issue TRCs, fairly and without bribes or unreasonable requirements, to undocumented Rohingyas. In addition, the Embassy worked closely with Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian NGOs involved in education and teacher training.

The country was first designated a CPC in 1999 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the International Religious Freedom Act, the Secretary of State designated the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(1), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The U.S. Government has a wide array of financial and trade sanctions in place against the country for violations of human rights. The passage and signing into law in July 2008 of the Tom Lantos Block Burmese Junta Anti-Democratic Efforts (JADE) Act further strengthened these sanctions. The United States has also opposed all assistance to the Government by international financial institutions and urged the governments of other countries to take similar actions. U.S. sanctions include a ban on imports from the country, a ban on the export of financial services to the country, a ban on bilateral aid to the Government, a ban on the export of arms to the country, and a suspension of General System of Preferences benefits and Overseas Private Investment Corporation and U.S. Export-Import Bank financial services in support of U.S. investment and exports to the country. The U.S. Government also ended active promotion of trade with the country, limited the issuance of visas to high-ranking government and military officials and their immediate family members, and froze SPDC assets in the United States. U.S. citizens have been prohibited from engaging in new investment activities in the country since May 1997.

BURUNDI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 10,747 square miles and a population of 8.1 million. Although reliable statistics on the followers of various religious groups are not available, sources estimate Roman Catholics to be 60 percent of the population, members of indigenous religious groups 20 percent, and Protestants 15 percent. The Muslim population is estimated to be between 2 and 5 percent, the majority of whom live in urban areas. Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims; the remainder is Shi'a.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. A 1992 law covering nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, is the basis for the recognition and registration of religious bodies.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ascension Day, the Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association of a religious nature must file the denomination or affiliation of the institution, a copy of its bylaws, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative. It usually takes between two and four weeks for the Ministry to process a registration request. During the reporting period, no religious institution had its request for registration refused.

The Ministry reminds religious groups of registration requirements; if the place of worship or association does not comply with these requirements, the Ministry instructs it to close down. Although a representative of the religious institution can be jailed for six months to five years for failing to comply with these instructions, the Ministry has not penalized any religious representatives in recent years.

While there is no law that accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Ministry of Finance often negotiates waivers of taxes on religious articles or goods imported by religious institutions that are destined for social development purposes. There is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

Foreign representatives of major religious organizations, such as the Catholic and Anglican Churches, are accorded diplomatic status.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CAMBODIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Buddhism is the state religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 67,000 square miles and a population of 14.1 million. An estimated 93 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist. The Theravada Buddhist tradition is widespread and strong in all provinces, with an estimated 4,330 pagodas throughout the country. The vast majority of ethnic Khmer Cambodians are Buddhist, and there is a close association between Buddhism, Khmer cultural traditions, and daily life. Adherence to Buddhism generally is considered intrinsic to the country's ethnic and cultural identity. The Mahayana school of Buddhism claims approximately 31,639 followers and has 88 temples throughout the country.

There are approximately 500,000 to 700,000 Muslims (between 3.5 to 5 percent of the population), predominantly ethnic Cham, who generally are found in towns and rural fishing villages on the banks of the Tonle Sap lake and the Mekong River, as well as in Kampot Province. Some organizations cite lower estimates for the number of Cham Muslims. There are four branches of Islam represented: the Malay-influenced Shafi'i branch, practiced by 88 percent of Cham Muslims; the Saudi-Kuwaiti-influenced Salafi (sometimes called "Wahhabi") branch, which claims 6 percent of the total Muslim population, although this number is increasing; the indigenous Iman-San branch, practiced by 3 percent; and the Kadiani branch, which also accounts for 3 percent. There are 244 mosques of the 4 main branches and 333 small Suravs, which are meeting places that have

congregations of up to 40 persons and do not have a minbar from which Friday sermons are given. Suravs may belong to any branch of Islam and are distinct from other types of mosques only in their architectural structure; they are usually much smaller and built in rural areas of the country.

The small but growing Christian community constitutes approximately 2 percent of the population. There are an estimated 100 Christian organizations or denominations that operate freely throughout the country. There are approximately 1,609 churches--1544 Protestant and 65 Roman Catholic. Only an estimated 900 of these churches are officially registered. Other religious groups with small followings include the ethnic Vietnamese Cao Dai and the Baha'i Faith, each with an estimated 2,000 practitioners.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion, and the Government does not tolerate abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors. Buddhism is the state religion, and the Government promotes Buddhist holidays, provides Buddhist training and education to monks and others in pagodas, and modestly supports an institute that performs research and publishes materials on Khmer culture and Buddhist traditions.

The law requires all religious groups, including Buddhist groups, to submit applications to the Ministry of Cults and Religions if they wish to construct places of worship and conduct religious activities. In their applications, groups must state clearly their religious purposes and activities, which must comply with provisions forbidding religious groups from insulting other religious groups, creating disputes, or undermining national security. There is no penalty for failing to register, and in practice some groups do not. Although the Ministry of Cults and Religions attempted to enforce a 2007 regulation requiring all churches to re-register in order to obtain a new operating license, no churches had complied within the reporting period.

The Directive on Controlling External Religions requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, in addition to government approval prior to constructing new places of worship. Places of worship must be located at least two

kilometers from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives from the law. The distance requirement applies only to new construction of places of worship and not to offices of religious organizations. There have been no cases documented where the directive was used to bar a church or mosque from constructing a new facility. The directive also requires that religious groups refrain from openly criticizing other groups. During the reporting period, there were no reports that any religious groups encountered significant difficulties in obtaining approval for construction of places of worship.

The Government permits Buddhist religious instruction in public schools. Other forms of religious instruction are prohibited in public schools; however, non-Buddhist religious instruction may be provided by private schools. The Government directed that all Muslim students and government employees be allowed to wear Islamic attire in class and in the office. The decision reflected respect for the beliefs of those other than the Buddhist majority.

All major Theravada Buddhist holidays are observed by the Cambodian Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Unlike in previous years, the Government did not close any madrassahs (Islamic schools). The Government has granted permission for the construction of a new Islamic college which will provide general education and skills training to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Government officials continued to organize meetings for representatives of all religious groups to discuss religious developments and to address problems of concern. The Ministry of Cults and Religion typically hosts two national interfaith meetings annually in preparation for the Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue. During the reporting period, however, no meetings were held. This was in part due to July 2008 elections during which time a new Minister of Cults and Religions was selected.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Minority religious groups experienced little or no societal discrimination during the reporting period; however, Muslims and Christians reported minor conflicts that were personal in nature.

Some Buddhists expressed concern about the Cham Muslim community receiving financial assistance from foreign countries; however Cham Muslims were generally well integrated into society, held prominent positions in business and the Government, and faced no reported acts of discrimination or abuse during the reporting period.

There are ecumenical and interfaith organizations, which are often supported by funding from foreign public or private entities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders on these issues and contacted representatives of religious nongovernmental organizations and other groups representing Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian religious groups.

The Embassy continued its Muslim engagement efforts, which provide for additional channels of information on the status of religious freedom among the Muslim population while also providing material assistance. The Embassy continued to provide financial support for the Voice of Cham radio station, which provides a forum for discussion of religious and other issues and is the only Cham language radio program in the country. The Embassy hosted a Ramadan reception

in Phnom Penh, with more than 150 Cham Muslim guests, and hosted an iftar for the Cham community in Kampot, a region approximately three hours south of Phnom Penh. The event attracted more than 100 leaders of the community, including imams, heads of madrassahs, and religious teachers.

The Embassy has worked to maintain close contact with the Buddhist and Christian religious communities through visits to wats (Buddhist temples) and churches and through joint programs. The Embassy hosted a series of seminars to promote a closer relationship between the Cham community and law enforcement officials in an attempt to broaden dialogue and promote community policing.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) continued to work with several Buddhist temples on a faith-based approach to helping people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Projects with Christian groups included Embassy-hosted events for the "Little Sprouts," a program for AIDS orphans run by the Catholic Maryknoll sisters, and puppet shows presented by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) during U.S. military medical missions. These programs afforded Embassy officers the opportunity to meet with both Buddhist and Christian religious figures on numerous occasions and assess the operating environment for their religious groups in the country.

CAMEROON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were a few reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 183,568 square miles and a population of 18.1 million. Approximately 40 percent of the population is Christian, and 20 percent Muslim. The remaining 40 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs. The Christian population is divided between Roman Catholics (27 percent of the total population) and Protestants (13 percent). The largest Protestant groups are Presbyterians and evangelicals, while Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals represent fewer than 2 percent of Protestants. There is also a small community of Baha'is.

Muslims and Christians are found in every region, with Christians concentrated primarily in the southern and western regions. Large cities have significant populations of both groups. The two Anglophone provinces of the western region are largely Protestant, and the Francophone regions of the southern and western regions are mostly Catholic. In the northern regions, the locally dominant Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is mainly Muslim, but the overall population is fairly evenly divided among Muslims, Christians, and followers of indigenous religious beliefs. The Bamoun ethnic group of the West Region is mostly Muslim. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced in rural areas throughout the country but are rarely practiced publicly in cities, in part because many of these beliefs are intrinsically local in character.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion. The Government observes and enforces the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and any citizen has the right to sue the Government for the violation of any constitutionally guaranteed freedom.

The law does not restrict religious publishing or other religious media. The Catholic Church operates two of the few modern private printing presses and publishes a weekly newspaper, *L'Effort Camerounais*. These private printing presses also print several privately held secular newspapers. The state-sponsored television station and radio stations broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services on a regular basis, as well as religious ceremonies on national holidays and during national events.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Feast of the Lamb, and Christmas.

The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the Government and religious groups. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) must approve and register religious groups for them to function legally. It is illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition; however, the law prescribes no specific penalties for violations, and numerous unregistered small religious groups operate freely.

To register, a religious denomination must legally qualify as a religious congregation. The definition includes "any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship" or "any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine." The denomination then submits a file to MINATD. The file must include a request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter describing planned activities, and the names and functions of the group's officials. The Minister reviews the file and sends it to the Presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. The President generally follows the recommendation of the Minister and grants authorization by a presidential decree. Although official recognition confers no general tax benefits,

it allows religious groups to receive real estate as tax-free gifts for the conduct of their activities.

The MINATD, rather than the judiciary, primarily resolves disputes between or within registered religious groups about control of places of worship, schools, other real estate, or financial assets.

Several religious denominations operate primary and secondary schools. The law charges the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education with ensuring that private schools run by religious groups meet the same standards as state-operated schools in terms of curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher training. For schools affiliated with religious groups, the Sub-Department of Confessional Education of the Department of Private Education performs this oversight function. Public schools do not incorporate religion into their curriculum. The Government gives an annual subsidy to all private primary and secondary education institutions, including those operated by religious denominations. There are also several religious universities around the country.

The practice of witchcraft, defined as any act of magic or divination liable to harm another person or property, is a criminal offense under the national penal code. The Government distinguishes between witchcraft and indigenous religious practice, and there were no cases of witchcraft trials that impinged upon indigenous religious belief.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Government does not register indigenous religious groups, stating that the practice of traditional religion is a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Established churches denounced new unaffiliated religious groups, most of which are Protestant, as "sects" or "cults," claiming that they were detrimental to societal peace and harmony. In practice, such denunciation did not inhibit the practice of the unaffiliated religious groups.

Christians and Muslims organized ecumenical ceremonies to pray and promote a spirit of tolerance and peace. During Pope Benedict XVI's March 2009 visit to the country, the Catholic Church (represented by the Episcopal Conference of Cameroon) organized a meeting between the Pope and Muslim leaders to emphasize peaceful coexistence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The Ambassador and other embassy officials met regularly with senior Christian and Muslim leaders, including women's groups, to express U.S. Government support for religious freedom.

A number of prominent religious and political leaders participated in International Visitor Leadership Programs dealing with religion. Most notably, religious and political leaders participated in a program entitled "Religion in the United States," which explained the core values of individual freedom of conviction, expression, and worship in U.S. society, the interplay between religion and politics in the United States and the role of religious leaders in the community. These leaders were able to use the knowledge acquired to promote interfaith dialogue in an effort to maintain the largely harmonious relationship between religions in this multireligious society.

CANADA

The Constitution, specifically the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3,855,101 square miles and a population of 33.5 million. According to the most recent census with questions about religious affiliation (2001), approximately 77.1 percent of the population is Christian. Roman Catholics (44 percent of the population) constitute the largest group, followed by Protestant denominations (29 percent). The United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches are the largest Protestant groups. The Muslim population stands at 2 percent, and approximately 1.1 percent of the population is Jewish.

Other religious groups include Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, each with an estimated 1 percent of the population. Several other religions, such as Scientology, the Baha'i Faith, Shintoism, and Taoism, each account for less than 1 percent. According to the 2001 census, 0.1 percent of the population identifies itself as followers of "aboriginal spirituality." Approximately 16 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation.

Approximately two-thirds of the country's net population growth is due to immigration. Most of these immigrants were born in Asia and generally practice religious beliefs different from the majority of native-born citizens. According to the 2006 census, "visible minorities" constitute 16.2 percent of the overall

population. Ninety-six percent of these minorities live in urban areas, with the metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver accounting for more than two-thirds of the national total of "visible minority" residents.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, specifically the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. The Government grants tax-exempt status to religious institutions through the Charities Directorate of the tax authority, the Canada Revenue Agency. This status provides religious institutions with federal and provincial sales tax reductions, rebates, and exemptions; it requires them to be nonpolitical, send overseas donations only to approved recipients, and undergo periodic audits. Through this same government-approved charitable status, clergy receive various federal benefits, including a clergy housing deduction under the tax code and expedited processing through the immigration system. Individual citizens who donate to religious tax-exempt institutions receive a federal tax receipt entitling them to federal income tax deductions.

The Constitution protects the rights and privileges possessed by religious minorities in their public, but denominational, schools at the time of national union in 1867. In practice, this protection means that some provinces (such as Ontario) fund Catholic school education under the category of public, not private, education. The law permits parents to homeschool their children and to enroll them in private schools for religious reasons. Education falls under the purview of the provinces, not the Federal Government. Six of the 10 provinces provide at least partial funding to some religious schools. Levels of direct funding for accredited private faith-based schools ranged across the country from 0 to 70 percent of the base instruction rate for per capita student grants and associated operating grants.

Ontario is the only province that funds Catholic religious education while providing no funding for other religious schools. The issue of extending public funding to non-Catholic religious schools in the province has been the subject of domestic litigation since 1978. In the 2007 Ontario provincial election, voters re-elected the incumbent government that had opposed a promise by the official opposition party to extend public funding to all religious schools. The provincial government has not officially reconsidered its dual system.

There was no official government council for interfaith dialogue; however, the Government provided funding for projects on an individual basis. In March 2009, citing a "zero tolerance approach toward anti-Semitism," the Federal Government launched a review of its public service grants to remove state support for groups that advocate hatred or express support for terrorism. The review was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The Federal Government provided \$2.4 million (C\$3 million) for a pilot program to enhance security for Jewish community institutions. In 2008 nearly 20 Jewish institutions received funding under this program.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Civil liberties organizations, the media, and some members of Parliament criticized federal and provincial human rights commissions and tribunals for their application of hate speech restrictions included in federal and provincial human rights acts, claiming that the commissions and tribunals at times limited free speech and expression, and religious rights. The commissions are required by law to process all complaints they receive.

In June 2009 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that an enforced blood transfusion for a teenaged minor and member of Jehovah's Witnesses was constitutional. The Jehovah's Witnesses member argued that provincial Manitoba child-protection officials violated her constitutional rights to security of the person and religious freedom by ordering her in 2006 to submit to a medically necessary blood transfusion.

In May 2009 a Quebec Superior Court heard an application by a group of parents in Drummondville, Quebec to exempt their children from mandatory enrollment in

an "Ethics and Religious Culture" course that provided an overview of world religions. In September 2008 Quebec's Education Ministry implemented the course in all elementary and secondary schools in the province, including private and religious schools. The parents alleged that the course contravened their Charter right to freedom of religion and conscience, as well as their choice of education for their children. The case remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

In January 2009 the British Columbia provincial government charged the current and former bishops of the Bountiful, British Columbia, Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) with breaching Section 293 of the Criminal Code, which bans polygamy. The outcome of these trials is expected to clarify the constitutionality of Section 293 of the Criminal Code. The province previously declined to prosecute on the basis that the law might not withstand a challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms' protection of religious freedom.

In early 2009 city transit authorities in Vancouver, Victoria, and Kelowna (all in British Columbia), London (Ontario), and Halifax (Nova Scotia) rejected an atheist bus advertisement campaign sponsored by the Freethought Association of Canada. The advertisement was displayed on buses in Toronto (Ontario), Montreal (Quebec), Calgary (Alberta), and Ottawa (Ontario).

In May 2009 an Ontario Superior Court judge ruled that there was no blanket right for a Muslim woman to wear a veil while testifying in court but did not issue a broad finding under the Charter of Rights, suggesting that judges should decide this question on an individual basis in court proceedings. The case followed the appeal of an October 2008 lower court ruling that a Toronto woman must remove her religious face covering when testifying in a sexual assault case. The Ontario Human Rights Commission, which argued that courts have a duty to accommodate religious beliefs, presented a submission to the judge during the Superior Court proceeding.

In October 2008 the Supreme Court of Canada heard an appeal by the Alberta government to uphold the province's 2001 decision to make provincial photo drivers licenses mandatory and to abolish an exemption that allowed individuals to opt out of being photographed for religious reasons. The Alberta government argued that mandatory photo licenses were necessary to improve security and deter fraud. Members of a Hutterite community in the province testified that the rule

would violate their constitutional right to freedom of religion. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In 2007 the federal chief electoral officer ruled that voters wearing religious face coverings could vote without showing their faces if they provided acceptable identification. The Federal Government disagreed and introduced legislation to amend the election law explicitly to require the visual identification of voters in all federal elections to deter fraud. However, the bill lapsed when the Governor General dissolved the 39th Parliament in advance of the October 2008 federal election.

In February 2009 a Saskatchewan provincial court acquitted former aboriginal leader David Ahenakew on a hate crime charge related to his 2002 public comments about Jews. The judge ruled that although Ahenakew's statements were "revolting, disgusting, and untrue," he was not guilty of intending to incite hatred since his comments appeared to be spontaneous. In March 2009 the Crown announced that it would not appeal the ruling.

In August 2008 the provincial Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission dismissed a complaint by the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities against journalist Ezra Levant for republishing Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad.

In 2008 the provincial Ontario Human Rights Commission dismissed a complaint filed by the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) against *Maclean's* magazine regarding the publication of articles and book excerpts by author Mark Steyn between 2005 and 2007. Although the Ontario Human Rights Commission ruled it had no jurisdiction over print media, it denounced the magazine for publishing "Islamophobic portrayals of Muslims." The federal Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and provincial British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal also dismissed concurrent CIC complaints alleging that the magazine had published anti-Islamic articles.

In December 2008 the CHRC dismissed a complaint against Muslim cleric Abou Hamaad Sulaiman Dameus al-Hayiti for his book attacking homosexuals, Jews, and Christians.

In July 2008 a homosexual rights activist filed an application before the Federal Court of Canada for judicial review of a decision of the CHRC to dismiss his

complaint against *Catholic Insight* magazine for allegedly promoting hatred of homosexuals. The application remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

In June 2008 Reverend Stephen Boissoin filed an appeal before an Alberta court of the May 2008 order by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission that he cease making disparaging comments about homosexuals, pay a fine of approximately \$6,570 (C\$7,000), and publish an apology. Boissoin's appeal to the Alberta provincial court remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In 2008 the B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 1,135 reports of anti-Semitic incidents, an 8.9 percent increase compared to 2007. The League noted that incidents had increased more than four-fold since 1998. The most reports came from the provinces of Ontario and Quebec (682 and 245 incidents, respectively); the vast majority of the country's Jewish population resides in these two provinces. Nearly half of the incidents occurred in the last four months of the year, which B'nai Brith correlated primarily to the economic recession. The 1,135 reports included 803 cases of harassment, 318 cases of vandalism, and 14 cases of violence.

In 2008 the Toronto Police Service reported 153 hate/bias occurrences and stated that Jews were the most targeted group (46 occurrences), followed by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community (34), blacks (24), Pakistanis (8) and other Muslims (7). Other groups were targeted in the remaining 34 crimes. According to the Toronto Police Service, the Jewish community represents 4 percent of the population of Toronto but were victims in 30 percent of the hate/bias crimes. Muslims represent 7 percent of the city's population and were victims in

10 percent of the crimes. According to the York Regional Police in Ontario, there were 83 hate-related incidents in 2008, with Jews as the single most targeted group (26 incidents), followed by blacks (19 incidents).

In April 2009 vandals spray-painted "We hate Jews" and "I love Hitler" at a public elementary school in Pickering, Ontario in the greater Toronto area. The police launched an investigation.

In February 2009 a mob chanting anti-Semitic slogans at York University in Toronto blockaded students at the campus Hillel center. Also in February 2009, after a year-long investigation, police in Hamilton, Ontario announced that no hate crime charges would be filed related to a 2008 rally at McMaster University where agitators had reportedly shouted "Death to Jews." Hate crime officers indicated that they did not have the necessary evidence to proceed.

In November 2008 authorities sentenced an individual to four years in prison and three subsequent years of probation for the firebombing of a Montreal Jewish boys' school in September 2006 and an attack on a Jewish community center in April 2007. In February 2009 a second individual pled guilty to nine counts related to the same incidents and received a seven-year prison sentence.

In November 2008 Quebec police arrested four individuals for vandalizing cars owned by Hassidic Jews in St. Agathe, pressing charges against two of them. In February 2009 a youth court sentenced one of them to community service. Police investigated the August 2008 assault on a Hassidic Jew walking to a synagogue in St. Agathe but declined to press charges.

In September 2008 authorities sentenced a woman to one year of probation as an accessory after the fact in her son's 2004 firebombing of the United Talmud Torah school in Montreal.

In July 2008 a man received a one-year jail sentence, with credit for time served, for his 2006 Calgary attack on a Jewish teenager and her three friends, one of whom he pushed from a transit train station platform onto the tracks. According to media reports, the then 21-year-old man shouted "I'm Muslim and hate Jews" while assaulting his victims.

In July 2008 vandals scrawled an anti-Semitic message and eight swastikas on a billboard at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. Winnipeg

police investigated the incident as a hate crime, but there were no further developments during the reporting period.

In June 2008 vandals spray-painted a mosque in Dorval, Quebec with the word "Koran" and numbers referencing particular verses. Police investigated the incident but were not able to make any arrests. In early 2009 there was a similar incident at the same mosque, but the mosque's president declined to file a police report. In July 2008 police reportedly detained two suspects following the repeated vandalism of a different mosque also located on Montreal's West Island.

In April 2009 a Quebec court convicted a teenaged Sikh boy of assault with his hairpin but acquitted him of assault with his ceremonial dagger (kirpan) in a schoolyard dispute.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with government officials at the federal, provincial, and local levels as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CAPE VERDE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Cape Verde is an archipelago consisting of 10 islands, nine of which are inhabited. It has an area of 1,557 square miles and a population of 500,000. More than 85 percent of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, according to an informal poll taken by local churches. The largest Protestant denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other groups include the Seventh-day Adventist Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Assemblies of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and various other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There are small Baha'i communities and a small but growing Muslim community. No reliable statistics exist on membership.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves.

The Penal Code states that violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to a penalty of between three months' and three years' imprisonment.

The Constitution provides for the separation of church and state and prohibits the state from imposing any religious beliefs and practices.

The Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status, although it is not the state religion. For example, the Government provides the Catholic Church with free television broadcast time for religious services.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. In addition, each municipality has a holiday to honor its Catholic patron saint.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association. All associations, whether religious or secular, must register with the Ministry of Justice to be recognized as legal entities. Registration is mandatory under the Constitution and the law of associations. Groups that register may apply for government or private loans and benefits as an association. To register, a religious group must submit to the Ministry of Justice a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. The Constitution sets forth the criteria for all associations, including religious ones, and states that an association may not be military or armed; may not be aimed at promoting violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship; and may not be in violation of penal law. However, failure to register with the Ministry of Justice does not result in any restriction on religious belief or practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, although it prohibits what the Government considers to be religious fundamentalism or intolerance. Witchcraft is a criminal offense under the penal code.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Private actors continued to abuse and discriminate against those accused of witchcraft; however, these accusations generally arose from personal disputes, not from specific religious or cultural practices.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 242,000 square miles and a population of 4.3 million. According to the 2005 census, Protestants make up 51 percent of the population, Catholics 29 percent, and Muslims 10 percent. The remainder practices indigenous beliefs (animism), although many indigenous beliefs are also incorporated into Christian and Islamic practice throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally permitted adherents of all religious groups to worship without interference. The Constitution prohibits what the Government considers to be religious fundamentalism or intolerance. The constitutional provision prohibiting religious fundamentalism is widely perceived as targeting Muslims; however, it is not supported by any additional legislation.

Religious groups (except for indigenous religious groups) are required by law to register with the Ministry of Interior. Registration is free and confers official recognition and certain limited benefits, such as customs duty exemption for the

importation of vehicles or equipment. The administrative police of the Ministry of Interior monitored groups that failed to register; however, the police did not attempt to impose any penalty on such groups.

The Government maintained strict legal requirements that restricted registration of new religious groups. The Ministry of Interior requires religious groups to prove they have a minimum of 1,000 members and leaders who graduated from what the Government considers high caliber religious schools. However, these requirements did not appear to be enforced during the reporting period.

The Ministry of Interior may decline to register any religious group it deems offensive to public morale or likely to disturb social peace. Registered religious groups later characterized as subversive may face suspension of their operations.

The Ministry of Interior may also intervene in religious organizations to resolve internal conflicts about property, finances, or leadership.

Witchcraft or sorcery is a criminal offense punishable by execution under the penal code, although most sentences are from one to five years in prison or a fine of up to \$1,760 (830,000 Communauté Financière Africaine francs). No one accused of witchcraft received the death penalty during the reporting period, but numerous individuals were arrested for these practices, often in conjunction with some other offense, such as murder. Accusations of witchcraft appear unrelated to religious practice and are often associated with personal disputes. The Government reinforces societal attitudes about the efficacy of sorcery by arresting and detaining persons accused of witchcraft, often under the guise of protecting the accused from harm by people within their communities.

Although authorities freed most people imprisoned for witchcraft or sorcery for lack of evidence, delays in court hearings often prolonged detentions. As of the end of the reporting period, the Government had detained 23 women accused of witchcraft in Bimbo prison, including three serving sentences of up to two years and 20 pretrial detainees.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Monday after Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. The Government does not observe Islamic holy days; however, Muslims are allowed to take these days off from work.

Students are not compelled to participate in religious education, but they are free to attend any religious program of their choosing. Although the Government does not explicitly prohibit religious instruction in public schools, such instruction is not part of the public school curriculum, nor is it common.

The Government grants religious groups one day of their choosing each week to make free broadcasts on the official radio station. Outside this regular time, religious groups pay fees for broadcast time, just like nonreligious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Government continued its September 2007 ban on the Eglise Jehova Sabaot church, primarily due to allegations of its pastor's involvement in various criminal operations. Although Eglise Jehova Sabaot was officially closed, its congregants continued to meet at private residences and were building a new, larger church.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Private actors continued to abuse and discriminate against people accused of witchcraft. Witchcraft is widely understood to encompass attempts to harm others by magic and established means, such as poisons. Although many indigenous religious groups accommodate belief in the efficacy of sorcery, accusations of witchcraft generally arose from personal disputes, not from specific religious or cultural practices.

On August 1, 2008, villagers in Pissa killed three persons accused of sorcery following the death of a young woman. Acting on the advice of a religious fortune teller, the villagers invaded a detention facility, wrested the accused from

gendarmes, and killed them. Five persons were arrested and continued to be detained at Mbaiki Prison, awaiting trial. According to the Mbaiki County Court President, the case was delayed because the lawyers for two detainees were not available.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CHAD

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government bans certain Muslim groups.

The Government continued to restrict some religious organizations and practices. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between fundamentalist and moderate Muslims. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 495,755 square miles and a population of 10 million. More than half of the population is Muslim, approximately one-third is Christian, and the remainder follows indigenous religious beliefs or has no religion. Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or indigenous religions. However, population patterns are becoming more complex, especially in urban areas.

The majority of Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A minority of Muslims (5 to 10 percent) hold more fundamentalist beliefs, which in some cases are associated with Wahhabism or Salafism.

Roman Catholics represent the largest Christian religious group. Most Protestants are affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups. Small Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses communities also are present.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government bans certain Muslim groups and indirectly monitors Islamic activities through the High

Council for Islamic Affairs, an independent religious organization. The Constitution provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, some policies favor Islam in practice.

A committee composed of members of the High Council for Islamic Affairs and the Directorate of Religious and Traditional Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior organizes trips to Mecca for Hajj and Umra.

While the Government is legally obligated to treat all religious groups or denominations equally, some non-Muslims allege that Muslims receive preferential status, particularly concerning use of public lands for building places of worship.

The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs oversees religious matters. Working under the Minister of the Interior, the Director is responsible for arbitrating intercommunal conflicts, reporting on religious practices, and ensuring religious freedom. The High Council for Islamic Affairs oversees Islamic religious activities, including the supervision of some Arabic language schools and higher institutions of learning and the representation of the country in international Islamic meetings.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs, in coordination with the President, also has the responsibility of appointing the grand imam, a spiritual leader for Muslims, who oversees each region's high imam and serves as head of the council. In principle, the grand imam has the authority to restrict proselytizing by other Islamic groups, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and exert control over activities of Islamic charities.

Religious leaders are involved in managing the country's wealth. A representative of the religious community sits on the Revenue Management College, the body that oversees the allocation of oil revenues. The seat rotates between Muslim and Christian leaders every four years. At the end of the reporting period, a Muslim religious leader held the seat.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas Day. It is common for Muslims and Christians to attend each other's festivities.

The Government requires religious groups, excepting indigenous groups but including foreign missionary groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior.

Registration takes place without discrimination and is interpreted as official recognition. Despite popular perceptions to the contrary, registration is not intended to confer tax preferences or other benefits on religious groups.

The Government prohibits activity that "does not create conditions of cohabitation among the populations." This prohibition is understood to mean regulating groups who advocate actions that would heighten sectarian tensions.

The Government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits all religious groups to operate private schools without restriction. Many Arabic Islamic-culture schools are financed by foreign donors--governments, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals--particularly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Kuwait. The Government called for the closure of certain Qur'anic schools that compel children to beg for food and money.

While most interfaith dialogue takes place on a private, voluntary basis, the Government is generally supportive of these initiatives. Government officials, including the President, regularly acknowledged the value of harmonious relations among religious groups and celebrated the country's religious diversity in public fora.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans Al-Mountada Al-Islami, the World Association for Muslim Youth, the Mecca Al-Moukarrama Charitable Foundation, and Al-Haramain Charitable Foundation for promoting violence to further religious goals.

The Government also bans Al Faid al-Djaria (also spelled Al Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group in the Kanem, Lake Chad, and Chari Baguirmi areas. The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and certain Ulama (Muslim religious authorities) objected to some of Al Faid al-Djaria's customs, such as the incorporation of singing, dancing, and the intermixing of sexes during religious ceremonies, which they deem un-Islamic. However, the group carries out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region.

The July 2007 ban on all forms of street corner evangelization and preaching remained in effect; however, local organizations could apply for government permission to engage in such activities. The Government usually grants such permission.

The Government reportedly monitored some organizations, such as Ansar al-Sunna, that adhere to a more austere interpretation of Islam and receive significant foreign funding.

On December 18, 2008, the Ministry of the Interior released a decree requiring that the High Council for Islamic Affairs request prior authorization from the Ministry before it conducted outreach activities. The High Council accused the Government of partiality and ignored the decree.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to detain Sheikh Ahmet Ismael Bichara following the June 2008 confrontation in Kuono between security forces and Bichara's supporters that left 72 persons dead. The Government regarded the detention as justified under its prohibition of activity that "does not create conditions of cohabitation among the populations."

The Government released Abakar Brahim, who was arrested in February 2008 and accused of mobilizing Muslims to pray for the release of a prominent opposition leader.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between fundamentalist and moderate Muslims. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom during the reporting period.

On April 4, 2009, a building that was also used as a church was vandalized and burned down in Biltine. There was no police investigation or reported suspects, and the motive remained unclear.

Religious groups met regularly to try to resolve sources of tension and promote greater collaboration. During these encounters, leaders discussed issues of

peaceful cohabitation, tolerance, and respect for religious freedom. During the March 2009 celebration of International Women's Week, women representing many religious groups called for more tolerance and peaceful cohabitation between Islam and Christianity. An ecumenical prayer service held in Koumra called for greater peace and justice in the country.

There continued to be reports of tensions within the Muslim community between leaders of the High Council for Islamic Affairs and some more fundamentalist groups regarding interpretations of practices, preaching, and the leading of prayers.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy continued a wide variety of outreach programs with the grand imam, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and other imams to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

In October 2008 the Embassy arranged a well attended series of discussions on "Islam in America" by American cleric Imam Yahya Hendi that emphasized the importance of religious pluralism and freedom.

CHILE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 292,260 square miles and a population of 15 million. According to the most recent census (2002), 70 percent of the population over age 14 identifies as Roman Catholic and 15.1 percent as evangelical. In the census, the term "evangelical" referred to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of the Orthodox Church (Greek, Persian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Armenian), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 90 percent of "evangelicals" are Pentecostal. Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Presbyterian, Anglican, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Methodist churches constitute the remaining 10 percent. Other groups include Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Buddhists, and members of the Unification Church.

Indigenous persons make up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Sixty-five percent of indigenous persons identify themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as evangelical, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continue to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicates a high degree of syncretism in worship and traditional healing practices.

Members of the largest religious groups (Catholics; Pentecostals and other evangelicals) are present throughout the country. Jewish communities are located in Santiago, Valparaíso, Viña del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepción, La Serena,

and Iquique (there is no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques are located in Santiago, Iquique, and Coquimbo.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion prohibits religious discrimination; however, the Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. Government officials attend Catholic events and also major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies. The national Office for Religious Affairs is mandated to work with all religious organizations to ensure the implementation of constitutional guarantees for religious freedom.

The Government observes Good Friday, the Feast of the Virgin of Carmen, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas as national holidays. In October 2008 the Government declared October 31 to be an annual national holiday to honor the evangelical and Protestant churches.

The law allows any religious group to apply for legal public right status (comprehensive religious nonprofit status). The Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration were not satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the Ministry or challenge the Ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the state cannot dissolve it by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that registered under the 1999 law was subsequently deregistered. In addition, the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate corporations. During the reporting period, 213 religious organizations registered under the 1999 law and gained legal public right status, bringing the total to 1,872 registered religious groups.

The 1999 law on religion grants other religious groups the same right that the Catholic Church possesses to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Catholic chaplains in hospitals and, if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other religions. In the prison system, there were 35 Catholic chapels, 40 paid Catholic chaplains, 25 volunteer Catholic chaplains, and 1,200 religious or lay volunteers authorized to conduct Catholic religious activities; there were nine paid evangelical Christian chaplains, 90 volunteer chaplains, and more than 2,000 evangelical Christian volunteers representing 200 evangelical groups.

In 2008 the Government approved regulations for the armed forces and law enforcement agencies that had been pending since the passage of the 1999 law. These regulations allow officially registered religious groups to appoint a chaplain to serve in each branch of the armed forces, in the national uniformed police, and in the national investigative police.

Publicly subsidized schools are required to offer religious education twice a week through high school; participation is optional (with parental waiver). Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Catholic, although the Ministry of Education approved curriculums for 14 other religious groups. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax, and non-Catholic religious education is often provided privately through Sunday schools and other venues. Local school administrators decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. The national Office of Religious Affairs recommended the creation of municipal Offices of Religious Affairs to develop community-supported curriculums in public schools and provide non-Catholic religious education where appropriate. The lack of non-Catholic religion teachers and funding constraints hindered implementation in all municipalities. Parents may homeschool their children or enroll them in private schools for religious reasons.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The celebration of Catholic Mass frequently marks official and public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of participating units may be obliged to attend.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On October 10, 2008, President Bachelet signed a law designating October 31 as an annual national holiday honoring the evangelical and other Protestant churches. Celebrated for the first time in 2008, it marks the day in 1517 when Martin Luther posted The Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Jewish Community of Chile, an umbrella organization that represents all Jewish organizations in the country, recorded 168 anti-Semitic incidents during the reporting period, an increase from 134 incidents during the previous period. These included spray-painted swastikas, other acts of vandalism, verbal slurs, and online harassment. On January 4, 2009, an unidentified individual called the police with a death threat against Jewish teenagers who were participating in a summer camp in Pirque. In September 2008 vandals desecrated several Jewish graves in the General Cemetery of Santiago.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CHINA

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet are appended at the end of this report.

The Constitution states that Chinese citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief." It also bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion. The Constitution and laws protect only "normal religious activities" that are overseen by the five (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (PRAs). Officials have wide latitude to interpret the phrase "normal religious activities." By law only the PRAs may register religious groups and places of worship. The Government permits proselytism in registered places of worship and in private settings, but does not permit it in public, in unregistered places of worship, or by foreigners. The Constitution states that religious bodies and affairs are not "subject to any foreign domination" and affirms the leading role of the officially atheist Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The Government took rhetorical steps to promote religious activity within the framework of the PRAs. The Government's repression of religious freedom also remained severe in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas as well as in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) during the reporting period. In its new National Human Rights Action Plan, the Government reinforced comments President Hu Jintao made on religion in his 2007 speech to the 17th CCP National People's Congress (NPC). The plan stated that the Government would "encourage and support religious circles in launching social welfare programs [and] exploring methods and channels for religions to better serve society and promote the people's well-being." The Government did not indicate whether these statements would apply to unregistered religious groups that were not affiliated with the PRAs.

Government officials allowed increased space for some unregistered religious groups it viewed as non-threatening. A branch of the State Council also held an unprecedented meeting with a delegation of "house church" leaders. The house church leaders requested that the Government allow registration independent of the PRAs. Several Chinese academics supported the request. The ability of unregistered religious groups to operate varied greatly depending on their location. Officials in some areas detained Protestant and Catholic believers who attended unregistered groups, while those in other areas did little to interfere with the worship or social service activities of such groups. Unregistered Protestant

religious groups in Beijing also reported that the Government closely monitored their activities during the period surrounding the 2008 Summer Olympic Games and sensitive anniversaries, such as the twentieth anniversary of the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square crackdown on democracy protests. Some unregistered house churches in Beijing reported that they were asked to stop meeting during the Olympics.

The Government repressed the religious activities of "underground" Roman Catholic clergy in large part due to their avowed loyalty to the Vatican, which the Government accused of interfering in the country's internal affairs. The Government also continued to restrict severely the activities of groups it designated as "evil religions," including several Christian groups and Falun Gong.

The Government took cautious measures to promote Buddhism, Taoism, and some folk religions within the framework of the PRAs. For example, in March 2009 the Buddhist Association of China co-organized the Second World Buddhist Forum in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province. During such conferences the Government promoted its religious policies by including speakers such as CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD) head Du Qinglin and Bainqen Erdini Qoigyijabu (born Gyaltzen Norbu), whom the Government recognizes as the 11th Panchen Lama.

In contrast, religious adherents in the XUAR, TAR and other Tibetan areas continued to suffer severe restrictions on religious activity, as a consequence of the Government's tendency to conflate concerns about separatism and religious extremism with peaceful expressions of religious beliefs and political views. In the XUAR, the Government's concerns also included terrorism. Ethnic Tibetans and Uighurs had difficulty obtaining passports from the Government, which limited their ability to travel abroad for religious purposes.

Followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including those in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and most Tibetan autonomous areas, faced more restrictions on their religious practice and ability to organize than did Buddhists in other parts of the country. Restrictions on religious practices remained tight in the TAR and other Tibetan areas following the outbreak of widespread unrest in March 2008. The Government continued "patriotic education" campaigns that included requiring monks and nuns to sign statements personally denouncing the Dalai Lama. Other restrictions on religious freedom also continued. (See separate appendix for additional reporting).

Both Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns reported they faced increased societal discrimination around sensitive periods like the August 2008 Olympic Games, including from Beijing hotelkeepers who denied them lodging.

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan made concerted efforts to encourage greater religious freedom in the country. U.S. officials condemned abuses while supporting positive trends within the country and urged the Government to expand the scope of religious freedom for both registered and unregistered religious groups according to citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of, asked to attend the trials of, and requested further information about numerous individual religious prisoners. U.S. officials encouraged the Government to address policies that restricted Tibetan Buddhist religious practices and that contributed to tensions. During the August 2008 Olympic Games, President Bush raised religious freedom issues in meetings with Chinese leaders and attended services at a registered Protestant church in Beijing. In February 2009, Secretary of State Clinton also visited a Protestant church in Beijing and discussed religious freedom with Chinese leaders. In May 2009, Speaker of the House of Representatives Pelosi raised religious freedom concerns and attended Mass at a registered Catholic church in Shanghai. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has assigned the "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) designation to the country under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3.5 million square miles and a population of 1.3 billion. A February 2007 survey, conducted by researchers in Shanghai and reported in state-run media, concluded that 31.4 percent of Chinese citizens ages 16 and over, totaling 300 million persons, are religious believers.

According to a Government white paper published in 1997, there are reportedly more than 100,000 officially recognized sites for religious activities, 300,000 officially recognized clergy, and more than 3,000 officially recognized religious organizations. China's government has not issued detailed statistics on religious faith since the 1997 white paper.

The Government officially recognizes five main religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. The Russian Orthodox Church operates in

some regions, particularly those with large populations of Russian expatriates or with close links to Russia. Foreign residents in the country who belonged to religious faiths not officially recognized by the Government were generally permitted to practice their religions, although Chinese citizens were often banned from participating in religious activity organized by foreign residents.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Buddhists and Taoists, because they do not have congregational memberships and many practice exclusively at home. However, a Chinese public opinion polling firm found in 2007 that 11 to 16 percent of Chinese adults are Buddhists but that fewer than one percent of Chinese adults identify themselves as Taoists. The state-approved Xinhua news agency estimates there are 100 million Buddhists in China. There are no official statistics confirming or contradicting the number of Taoists in China.

According to official figures, there are as many as 20 million Muslims. Independent estimates range as high as 50 million or more. There are more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in the XUAR), more than 45,000 imams nationwide, and 10 Islamic schools.

The country has 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which is the Hui, estimated to number more than 10 million. The Hui are centered in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but there are significant concentrations of Hui throughout the country. Hui Muslims slightly outnumber Uighur Muslims, who live primarily in the XUAR. According to an official 2005 report, the XUAR had 23,900 mosques and 27,000 clerics at the end of 2004, but fewer than half of the mosques were authorized to hold Friday prayer and holiday services. In Beijing, there are 200,000 Hui Muslims and 160 mosques. The Government supports the building of mosques, pays the salaries of imams, and supports halal stores and hospitals.

Officials from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC), the state-approved Protestant religious organization, estimated that at least 20 million citizens worship in official churches. Government officials stated there are more than 50,000 registered TSPM churches and 18 TSPM theological schools. The World Christian Database estimates there are more than 300 unofficial house church networks. The Pew Research Center estimates 50 million to 70 million Christians practice without state sanction. One Chinese scholar estimated in a public lecture at Renmin University that the number of Christians in China, including those in TSPM churches and unregistered churches, is near 90 million. By contrast, the Chinese Communist Party is estimated to have

60 million members, 10 million of whom are believed to participate regularly in religious services. Currents of Calvinism or Reformed theology gained influence among house churches and Christian intellectuals. Pentecostal Christianity was also popular among house churches.

Although the Government authorized funding to build new places of worship for registered venues, the number of temples, churches, and mosques has not kept pace with growth in the number of worshippers. For example, in Beijing, a city of 17.4 million, there are only 13 registered Protestant churches. Some registered churches faced difficulty registering new church venues. The shortage of space in registered churches is one factor driving the proliferation of unregistered churches and groups.

The Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) reports that 5.3 million persons worship in its churches, and it is estimated that there are an additional 12 million or more persons who worship in unregistered Catholic churches that do not affiliate with the CPA. According to official sources, the Government-sanctioned CPA has more than 70 bishops, nearly 3,000 priests and nuns, 6,000 churches and meeting places, and 12 seminaries. There are thought to be approximately 40 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are in prison or under house arrest. Of the 97 dioceses in the country, 40 reportedly did not have an acting bishop in 2007, and more than 30 bishops were over 80 years of age.

Falun Gong is a self-described spiritual discipline that is Buddhist in nature. Falun Gong combines the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of its founder Li Hongzhi. Prior to the Government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, it estimated that there were 70 million adherents; the Government subsequently adjusted the number of adherents to approximately 2 million. Falun Gong sources estimate that tens of millions continue to practice privately.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution protects "normal religious activities." However, citizens do not have the ability to bring legal action based on the Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom. Religious groups are vulnerable to coercive action by local officials who often regulate through classified or informal administrative orders. The Government restricted legal religious practice to government-sanctioned

organizations, registered religious groups, and registered places of worship and sought to control the growth and scope of the activity of both registered and unregistered religious groups. The Government strongly opposed the profession of loyalty to religious leadership outside the country, most notably the Pope and the Dalai Lama. The treatment of religious groups varied significantly. Membership in many faiths continued to grow rapidly.

The 2005 Regulations on Religious Affairs (RRA) give registered religious groups limited legal protections that unregistered groups do not enjoy (i.e., they may possess property, publish literature, train and approve clergy, and collect donations). The five PRAs are the only national organizations that have been allowed to register as religious organizations under the Regulations on Social Organizations (RSO), administered by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Religious groups outside the five PRAs not only have great difficulty obtaining legal status, they are also vulnerable to coercive and punitive action by Public Security Bureau (PSB) and Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officials who monitor their facilities, check to see that religious activities do not disrupt public order, and take measures directed against groups designated as evil religions.

PRA leaders sometime serve in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory forum under CCP leadership that consults with social groups outside the CCP or the NPC. The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) under the State Council and the UFDW provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of regulations regarding religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity. Employees of SARA and the UFDW are primarily Communist Party members who according to Party doctrine must be atheists.

While the activities of unregistered religious groups remained outside the scope of the RRA's legal protection, these groups and their activities continued to expand. Unregistered Christian "house churches" and Buddhist "private temples" are common throughout the country. Most Christian groups, the majority of which are not members of the PRAs, no longer operated in strict secrecy. Instead, they carried out their activities openly, including convening seminars, publishing materials, renting space for offices and events, and disseminating information on the Internet.

SARA has stated that according to the RSO, a religious group must affiliate with one of the five PRAs in order to register. Nearly all local RAB officials require registered Protestant congregations and clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC.

Unregistered Catholic groups are also required to affiliate with the CPA. The RAB told some unregistered house churches that attempted to register that their clergy did not have the requisite TSPM/CCC credentials. Other groups reported authorities denied their applications without cause or detained group members when they attempted to register.

The Government contended these refusals were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements. In some areas, local governments have legalized certain religions and practices, including Orthodox Christianity (in Heilongjiang) and the worship of folk deities such as Mazu (in Fujian) and Huangdaxian in southern Zhejiang and Guangdong. Some ethnic minorities have retained or reclaimed traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi.

Some unregistered Protestant groups refuse to register or affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they believe the TSPM/CCC accepts rules imposed by the Government that conflict with their religious convictions. In particular, some house churches have objected to the TSPM's restrictions on evangelism, baptism, and receiving religious materials from abroad. Moreover, some groups disagreed with the TSPM/CCC teachings that differences in the tenets of different Protestant creeds can be reconciled or accommodated under one "post-denominational" religious umbrella organization. Others did not seek registration independently or with one of the PRAs due to fear of adverse consequences if they revealed, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders or members. Unregistered groups also frequently did not affiliate with one of the PRAs for fear that doing so would allow government authorities to regulate sermon content and speakers.

A growing number of unregistered religious groups have chosen to affiliate with a registered venue of the TSPM. These groups are now able to meet legally with the supervision of the registered venue's leaders. Some Chinese observers have noted that affiliated groups are limited in their ability to conduct Christian sacraments, such as baptism and communion, and that TSPM leaders must approve speakers for worship services.

In the XUAR, the Government banned a number of religious activities. According to a document on the website of the regional government of Chinggil (Qinghe) County, Altay District, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, 23 kinds of "illegal religious activities" were banned, including opening private schools to study religious texts, conducting marriage ceremonies in traditional manner, encouraging students to attend religious services, collecting religious taxes or fees, printing and

distributing religious "propaganda," and arbitrarily growing a religious following. Parents were prohibited from allowing minors to engage in religious activities according to Article 14 of the Xinjiang Implementing Measures of the Law on the Protection of Minors. According to the RRA, only the Islamic Associations of China (IAC) may operate Hajj tours to Mecca.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Government banned groups it determined to be "evil religions"--the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Zhong Gong (a qigong exercise discipline), and Falun Gong. There are reports that dedicated government offices were responsible for coordinating operations against Falun Gong. The Government also considers several Protestant Christian groups to be evil religions, including the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church, Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (also known as San Ba Pu Ren), Association of Disciples, Lord God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, Family of Love, and South China Church.

According to Article 300 of the Criminal Law, religious groups engaging in activities such as "gathering people to besiege government organizations, holding assemblies to incite members to disrupt social order or publishing false materials" could be in violation of the law against evil religions. Violations carried penalties of up to seven years in prison.

According to Article 251 of the Criminal Law, officials who deny citizens their right to religious belief can be sentenced to up to two years in prison.

The work of faith-based nonprofit organizations continued to expand rapidly, and the Government increased its rhetorical support for these efforts, especially in the aftermath of the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake. RRA Article 35 permits registered religious groups to accept donations from organizations and individuals both inside and outside the country. House church groups and other unregistered religious groups are ineligible to receive tax-free status since they do not have legal standing. Unregistered religious groups frequently sought opportunities to provide social services, including in the zone affected by the earthquake. Registered groups that contributed resources to disaster relief faced limits on their ability to provide services due to legal restrictions placed on them.

According to reports, some religious adherents opposed the state's family planning policy for reasons of religious belief and practice. The Roman Catholic Church

forbids abortions and the use of artificial contraception. Many Protestant leaders also teach that abortion violates the Biblical commandment not to kill. Some Muslims oppose abortion on grounds that children are a gift from Allah. In some areas of the country, government population control agencies required women to use contraception, be sterilized, and have abortions if their pregnancies violated government population control regulations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's repression of religious freedom remained severe in Tibetan areas and in the XUAR. While several of Beijing's estimated 2,000 house churches reported that authorities told them not to meet during the 2008 Summer Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, these groups held services throughout the duration of the Olympics and the reporting period.

Following the March 14, 2008, outbreak of violence in Lhasa, government officials and state media increased their vilification of the Dalai Lama, including public accusations that the Dalai Lama incited Tibetans to riot. In March 2009, the 50th anniversary of the failed Tibetan uprising, official criticism of the Dalai Lama again increased. Employers forced some Tibetans to celebrate the Tibetan New Year holiday on February 25 and a new Serf Emancipation Day holiday March 28. Most Tibetans had planned not to celebrate the Tibetan New Year, in commemoration of the Tibetans who died during the unrest and violence that occurred across the Tibetan plateau in the spring of 2008.

The Government repressed Protestant house church networks and cross-congregational affiliations, which it perceived as presenting a potential challenge to the authority of the Government or the Party. For example, on November 28, 2008, the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a decision abolishing the 250,000-member Chinese House Church Alliance (CHCA), which claims to have members in several provinces, stating that the CHCA was not registered and was engaging in activities in the name of a social organization without authorization.

On February 10, 2009, six Chinese police officers and officials from SARA visited Cui Quan, chief pastor of the 1,200-member Wanbang Missionary Church of Shanghai, and ordered him to cancel the Fourth Seminar of Chinese Urban House Church Pastors Fellowship. Cui Quan refused to do so. Two days later, after moving the conference to another location, he discovered police had ordered the landlord of Wanbang Church to terminate his rental agreement within 30 days.

Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce government policy regarding unregistered churches and illegal religious activities, although the extent to which officials interfered with the activities of unregistered churches varied and depended largely on local conditions. Urban house churches in some areas limited the size of their meetings to a few dozen individuals. In nonurban areas, some house churches were able to hold meetings that hundreds of individuals attended with which local authorities did not interfere. Some unregistered religious groups had significant membership, properties, financial resources, and networks. House churches faced more risks when their memberships grew, they arranged for regular use of facilities for religious activities, or forged links with other unregistered groups or coreligionists overseas.

In some areas, government authorities pressured house churches to affiliate with one of the PRAs and to register with religious affairs authorities by organizing registration campaigns and by detaining and interrogating leaders who refused to register. In other parts of the country unregistered groups grew rapidly and the authorities did not pressure them to register.

Although SARA does not officially acknowledge the existence of house churches, its website states that family and friends holding meetings at home (as distinct from formal worship services in public venues) need not register with the Government (the "Family and Friend Worship Policy"). Police and officials of local RABs in some areas disrupted home worship meetings, claiming that participants disturbed neighbors or social order, or belonged to an "evil religion." Police sometimes detained for hours or days worshippers attending such services and prevented further worship activities. Police interrogated church leaders and lay persons about their worship activities at locations including meeting sites, hotel rooms, and detention centers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reported that church leaders faced harsher treatment than members, including greater frequency and length of detention, formal arrest, and reeducation-through-labor or imprisonment. According to NGO and media reports, in some cases local officials also confiscated and destroyed the property of unregistered religious groups.

Citizens are not permitted to attend religious services conducted by foreigners unless the services take place in an authorized venue under the supervision of a registered religious group. Citizens were not allowed to attend expatriate worship services, but foreigners were occasionally invited to preach at worship services at registered religious venues. On April 12, 2009, American Catholic Bishop

Ignatius Wang celebrated Easter Mass for an estimated 2,000 attendees at Xujiahui Cathedral, Shanghai's largest registered Catholic church.

The Regulations on the Religious Activities of Foreigners forbid proselytizing but do not prohibit foreigners from attending worship services at registered religious venues. Many expatriate Christian groups throughout the country have developed close ties with local officials. In some cases they are allowed to provide social services such as operating schools and homes for the care of the elderly.

Official tolerance for groups associated with Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for groups associated with other religions. The China Religious Culture Communication Association, in cooperation with SARA, organized the first and second World Buddhist Forums in 2006 and March 2009, respectively, and the International Dao DeJing (the sacred text of Taoism) Forum in 2007. The Government also labeled some folk religions as "feudal superstitions," and in the past there were reports that followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

The Government's official policy was that only religious leaders affiliated with the PRAs were to receive religious instruction. There was a severe shortage of trained clergy for both registered and unregistered religious groups. PRA-affiliated organizations administered local religious schools, seminaries, and institutes to train priests, ministers, imams, Islamic scholars, and Buddhist monks. The Government required students to demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates had to pass an examination on their political, as well as theological, knowledge to qualify for the clergy.

The shortage of training opportunities in the country has resulted in the creation of informal "field seminaries," lay leadership training programs, and online training resources for Christians. Some critics of the Government's policies on religion saw a lack of educational opportunities for mainstream clergy and the lack of access to religious texts and supplementary readings as factors that led some religious groups to develop unorthodox, or what the Government characterizes as "evil religion," beliefs. Academics also reported that the Government's "patriotic education campaigns," which included compulsory political education in Tibetan monasteries, sometimes interfered with normal religious studies. The Government also strengthened political education for imams in the XUAR.

The Government continued to allow Dallas Theological Seminary to host online courses for clergy through the TSPM-run Yanjing Theological Seminary. Bible

Study Fellowship also provided materials used to train clergy affiliated with registered and unregistered religious groups. The Government also allowed an increasing number of PRA-approved Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and some Buddhist monks to travel abroad for additional religious study. In practice, some had difficulty obtaining passports or approval to study abroad.

In 2005, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the country had no national regulations preventing children from receiving religious instruction. Even so, officials sometimes disrupted religious classes for children.

Concerns about separatism, religious extremism, and terrorism fueled repressive security measures by the Government of the XUAR, some of which restricted peaceful expressions of religious belief by Uighur Muslims. In contrast to the close supervision of the practice of Islam in the XUAR, Muslims in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan Provinces engaged in religious practice with little interference by the Government.

Authorities often failed to distinguish among those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities, and violent terrorism. Therefore, it was often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those who were peacefully seeking political goals or the right to worship, or those engaged in violence.

In the XUAR, the Government pledged to root out religious activities it deemed illegal, including religious education independent of the IAC, Hajj travel independent of the IAC, and use of religious texts deemed illegal. According to websites and public announcements of local governments in the XUAR, officials began collecting signatures of citizens who agreed to resist "illegal religious activities" and promised to hold open trials of individuals accused of "illegal religious activities" to demonstrate its consequences to the public. The Government instructed imams to increase their efforts to gather information on worshippers and warned that they would be held responsible if their students took part in illegal religious activities. Tabligh (sharing one's faith with others) was deemed an "outstanding problem."

Compared to other provinces and autonomous regions, the XUAR government maintained the most severe legal restrictions on a child's right to practice religion, and XUAR authorities in a few areas prohibited women, children, CCP members, and government workers from entering mosques. Tight controls on religion in the XUAR reportedly affected followers of other religions as well. NGOs reported

restrictions on public expressions of faith by teachers, professors, and university students, including during Ramadan.

The Government attempted to enforce the RRA by limiting Hajj trips independent of the IAC. Some Uighur Muslims sought passage to Mecca from points outside the country for a variety of reasons, including to save money, to avoid cumbersome restrictions and procedural requirements, or to avoid tests of "patriotism" by the Government.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, Communist Party membership is required for almost all high-level positions in government, state-owned businesses, and many official organizations. The CCP has stated that party members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army states explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities."

Nonetheless, some Communist Party officials engage in religious activity, most commonly Buddhism or a folk religion, and a growing number of Communist Party members have become Christians. Leaders of the PRAs, which are included in national and local government organizations to represent their constituencies on cultural and educational matters, may be members of the CCP. An analysis by the Pew Forum of a 2005 survey conducted by InterMedia, an international research and consulting organization, found that 33 percent of Communist Party officials and government employees are very or somewhat interested in having media access to information on the topic of religion. This makes them the most interested occupational group among the dozen or so groups reported.

The Government interfered with the employment of some individuals due to their religious or spiritual beliefs or activities. There were widespread reports that employers, both Chinese and foreign, were discouraged from hiring members of Falun Gong. There were also several reports from Protestant Christians that they were terminated by their employers due to their religious activities. In April 2009, Liu Aixin, a professor at Yang-En University, reported that the university terminated his employment because of his Christian activities.

Under the RRA, registered religious organizations may compile and print materials for their internal use. However, if they plan to distribute their materials publicly, they must follow national printing regulations, which restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. The 1994 Provisions Regarding

the Administration of Contracts to Print Bible Texts named the Nanjing Amity Printing Company (Amity Press) as the sole printer for domestic Bibles. A few CPA dioceses that have their own presses reportedly print the Catholic Bible. Bibles so produced could be purchased only at TSPM or CPA churches.

Amity has printed more than 50 million Bibles for the Chinese readership and distributes them through a network of 70 urban distribution points and a mobile distribution network that travels to rural areas. In April 2009, 20 Australian members of the Bible Society, which works with Amity Printing Company, distributed 10,000 Bibles throughout the country. The Government authorized publishers (other than Amity Press) to publish at least 1,000 Christian titles. Even so, increasing interest in Christianity produced a corresponding increase in demand for Bibles and other Christian literature, and members of unregistered churches reported that the supply and distribution of Bibles was inadequate in some rural locations. Individuals could not order Bibles directly from publishing houses, and distributors were sometimes wary of unfavorable attention that orders for purchases of large volumes of Bibles might attract.

Under the RRA and regulations on publishing, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qur'ans, may be confiscated and unauthorized publishing houses closed. Religious adherents are subject to arrest and imprisonment for illegal publishing. Authorities often confiscated Bibles in raids on house churches. Customs officials continued to monitor the importation of Bibles and other religious materials. In the XUAR, government authorities also at times restricted the sales of the Qur'an.

The Government and the Holy See have not established diplomatic relations, and there was no Vatican representative in the country. The role of the Pope in selecting bishops, the status of underground Catholic clerics, and Vatican recognition of Taiwan remained obstacles to improved relations. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated that the Government advocated improvement in relations.

The CPA does not recognize the authority of the Holy See to appoint bishops; however, it allowed the Vatican's discreet input in selecting some bishops. An estimated 90 percent of official Catholic bishops have reconciled with the Vatican. Likewise, the majority of Catholic bishops appointed by the Government have received official approval from the Vatican through "apostolic mandates."

The distinction between the official Catholic Church, which the Government controls politically, and the unregistered Catholic Church has become less clear over time. In some official Catholic churches, clerics led prayers for the Pope, and pictures of the Pope were displayed.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, officials continued to scrutinize, and in some cases harass, registered and unregistered religious and spiritual groups. In some areas government officials abused the rights of members of unregistered Protestant and Catholic groups, Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and members of groups the Government designated "evil religions," especially Falun Gong. Reports of abuse of religious freedom in the XUAR, Tibetan areas, and Beijing continued during the reporting period.

The Government detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms many religious leaders and adherents for activities related to their religious practice; however, the Government denied detaining or arresting anyone solely because of his or her religion. Local authorities often used an administrative process, through which citizens may be sentenced by a non-judicial panel of police and local authorities to up to three years in reeducation through labor (RTL) camps, to punish members of unregistered religious groups. During the reporting period, the Government reportedly held religious adherents and members of spiritual movements in RTL camps because of their religious beliefs. In 2009, the Government reported that there a total of 190,000 individuals were being held in 320 RTL camps throughout the country. The Laogai Research Foundation has estimated that there may be 500,000 to 2 million individuals in RTL camps. In some areas security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention, physical attacks, and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers.

Offenses related to membership in unregistered religious groups were often classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. Religious leaders and worshippers, however, faced criminal and administrative punishment for a wide variety of activities, including those related to the Government's refusal to allow members of unregistered groups to assemble, travel, and publish, or in connection with its ban on public proselytizing. Some members of unregistered groups were charged with conducting illegal business operations in relation to their publishing activities.

In February 2009, several prominent religious leaders were harassed, placed under surveillance, restricted to their homes, or forced to leave Beijing during the visit of Secretary of State Clinton. These leaders included Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, president of the CHCA, and Christian writer Yu Jie. Authorities also reportedly ordered several Christian leaders to leave Beijing during the Olympic Games.

Prominent religious leaders and religious freedom activists and their family members continued to serve time in prison. On February 4, 2009, a dozen police officers forcibly took Christian attorney Gao Zhisheng from his hometown in Shaanxi. Gao had defended house church Christians and Falun Gong members. The Ministry of Justice rated him one of the country's top ten lawyers in 2001. After his arrest, NGOs published a letter he reputedly wrote detailing more than 50 days of brutal torture at the hands of police during a detention in 2007. Gao claimed he was tortured in retribution for writing an open letter to President Bush and the U.S. Congress describing the Government's human rights abuses, including religious freedom abuses against Falun Gong and house churches. He also questioned the choice of Beijing as host of the 2008 Olympic Games. Gao's current whereabouts were unknown at the end of the reporting period. Gao's wife and children, who resettled in the United States during the reporting period, stated that security officials kept them under constant surveillance at home and school while they lived in Beijing. During sensitive periods, they were forcibly relocated to other parts of the country.

In October 2008, on the eve of the third anniversary of the CHCA, Beijing authorities severely beat the two sons of Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, Zhang Jian and Zhang Chuang. Authorities also forcibly relocated Zhang and detained his wife and sister-in-law at approximately the same time. Authorities pressed Zhang to sign a document agreeing to abolish the CHCA, and when Zhang refused and attempted to file an administrative statement of complaint, the court refused to accept his case.

In September 2007, an overseas NGO reported that Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang's health continued to deteriorate in prison. He was sentenced in June 2006 to seven years and six months in prison on charges of obtaining a fraudulent passport and illegally crossing the border. At the end of the reporting period, Zhang continued to serve out his sentence.

On February 8, 2009, 79-year-old Shuang Shuying was released from prison after serving a two-year prison sentence. Shuang had been sentenced in April 2007, reportedly in an effort to pressure her son, house church pastor Hua Huiqi, into

providing information to the Government about individuals who visited him. Hua was detained during the Beijing Olympic Games en route to a worship service at Kuanjie Church at which President Bush was present.

Ablikim and Alim Kadeer, sons of Rebiya Kadeer, a human rights and religious freedom advocate for Uighur Muslims, continued to serve nine- and seven-year prison terms, respectively, on charges related to state security and economic crimes. They were arrested days after Kadeer was elected president of a Uighur human rights organization in 2006.

In January 2009, officials from the TSPM, RAB, and PSB seized the house of Christian preacher and evangelist, Chang Fengying, after years of reported persecution. Chang, her husband, and their son had hosted a house church meeting in their home with more than 200 members.

On December 14, 2008, more than 50 officers from the SARA and the PSB raided Liangren Church in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, during a Sunday service. Officers issued a "Notice of Administrative Penalty" charging the members of the house church with organizing an "illegal gathering" and demanded that they stop their gatherings. Liangren Church's members are mostly college students. They claimed the PSB started watching them after they sent members to assist with earthquake relief efforts in Sichuan.

On December 3, 2008, in Henan Province, officials from the Taikang County Domestic Defense Protection Squad reportedly broke into a home and arrested more than 50 house church Christians, seizing 22 copies of the textbook "Training in Ministering the Gospel to Children" along with other information about proselytizing. Twenty Christians were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention and a US\$146 (1,000 RMB) fine. Three members each received a one-year sentence of RTL for "illegal proselytizing" and attending an "illegal gathering."

On November 2, 2008, police simultaneously raided nine house churches associated with the "Local Church" network in Hangzhou city, Zhejiang Province. Each of the nine house church meetings had approximately 25 to 30 persons present. Police handcuffed the nine leaders and took them to the local PSB office. More than 30 other church members were also arrested. College students present were required to write a confession paper and a statement guaranteeing that they would not go to other gatherings. A day after the incident, family members were notified that the nine leaders would be detained for two weeks. Five were

released after being detained eight to 15 days under administrative detention. Four of the leaders were given sentences of 12 to 18 months of RTL and accused of "preaching to students."

On October 12, 2008, police raided a house church in Nanyang city, Henan Province. Four individuals were sentenced to five days each of administrative detention. Their pastor, Zhu Baoguo, was charged with being a member of an "evil religion" and sentenced to one year of RTL. Zhu was released in December 2008 for medical reasons.

On September 27, 2008, police in Yanqing County, near Beijing, interrogated more than 110 house church Christians and detained two in administrative detention. The members of the house church, all college students and other young adults, were detained, questioned and photographed. Authorities also contacted the universities of the students. Two individuals received administrative detention: Shi Lei was held for 10 days, and Chen Xianchuang was held 13 days on charges of "using an evil religion to engage in illegal gathering."

Uighur Christians reported tightening controls on house church worship.

On March 6, 2009, in XUAR, Pastor Lou Yuanqi received a verdict of insufficient evidence on charges of "utilizing superstition to undermine the law." The prosecutor sent his case back to the PSB. Despite this ruling, Lou continued to be imprisoned at the end of the reporting period. Lou was originally arrested in May 2008.

On January 2, 2009, PSB officers raided a house church in Urumqi, XUAR. Fifty-one Christians were detained for questioning, with 48 released later that day. Two church leaders, Zhu Jinfeng and Yang Miaofa, were released after paying a fine. One leader, Zhou Li, was sentenced to 10 days' administrative detention.

Two Uighur Christians, both of whom were arrested in 2007 reportedly because of their work at expatriate Christian firms, remained in custody.

On March 31, 2009, Uyghur Christian Alimujiang Yimiti was reportedly seen at Nongsanshi Hospital in Kashgar. He was under police escort with his hands bound. Yimiti was arrested in January 2008 on charges of "engaging in illegal religious activities in the name of business" and preaching Christianity to ethnic Uighurs, according to an NGO. The Government later charged him with "subversion of the national government and endangering national security."

Although in May 2008 his case was returned to prosecutors for "insufficient evidence," he remained in jail.

Wusiman Yiming, who was arrested in November 2007 and accused of "assisting foreigners with illegal religious activities," continued to serve his sentence of two years' reeducation through labor in Kashi detention center, Hetian, XUAR. His wife said after visiting him that he was suffering from malnutrition and an injury to his hand.

On December 25, 2008, a house church in Bozho, Anhui Province, was raided while holding Christmas services. The Government arrested two leaders.

On the same day, during a Christmas service in Qitai County, XUAR, seven house church leaders were arrested by the PSB officials. The two Bozho church leaders and the seven Qitai church leaders were in prison at the end of the reporting period. On December 24, 2008, in Yucheng County, Henan Province, nine Christian women were arrested while reenacting the nativity on the street. Five of the women were forced to pay fines of up to 3,500 RMB (USD 515) before being released. The rest were detained for two weeks.

On December 16, 2008, in Nanyang, Henan Province, more than 40 pastors and house church leaders were detained at a Christian leaders' gathering. Each was required to pay a USD \$146 to \$292 (1,000 to 2,000 RMB) fine. Sixteen Christians were additionally sentenced to 10 to 15 days' administrative detention for engaging in an "illegal religious gathering."

In November 2008, in four separate incidents in Hubei, four Christians were seen being forcibly taken away by PSB officials. None of the four were seen again. The missing people are Yi Peng, Zhu Yongping, Wang Ke, and one other unnamed man.

In July 2008, four Christians in Inner Mongolia were arrested and their houses searched. On July 6 the Municipal PSB detained Yu Yongqing, a house church missionary. The PSB also arrested Christians Li Li, Li Shusen, and Wang Shuang, whom police reportedly tortured. The charges against them were "utilizing an evil religion to undermine the implementation of state law." Li Li was reportedly also accused of "associating with overseas reactionaries."

On July 4, 2008, Pastor Zhang Zhongxin was sentenced by the reeducation-through-labor committee of Jining City, Shandong Province, to two years of RTL.

Authorities accused him of participating in an "evil religion" for his role in organizing Sunday school training courses and for preaching in Tibet.

On December 31, 2008, Yuan Shenlun, a coal miner, was arrested and accused of "using an evil religious organization to obstruct justice." He had received a call from a stranger asking him to pick up religious pamphlets, but when he went to meet the stranger, he was instead arrested by PSB officers. Yuan was previously arrested in 1983; he was accused of being part of the Christian "Shouter" sect (which the Government has designated an "evil religion") and served 14 years in prison.

The Government detained a number of individuals on charges relating to illegal publication of religious materials. On April 9, 2009, bookstore owner Shi Weihang stood trial for printing and distributing Bibles and Christian books without government permission. Shi was initially detained in November 2007, but authorities released him in January 2008 due to insufficient evidence. He was taken into custody again in March 2008. In June 2009, a Beijing court sentenced Shi to three years in prison.

In some locations, local authorities reportedly forced unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce ordinations approved by the Holy See, join the official church, or face a variety of punishments including fines, job loss, detentions, and having their children barred from school. Ongoing harassment of unregistered bishops and priests was reported, including government surveillance and repeated short detentions. Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported, in particular in Hebei Province, traditionally home to many unregistered Catholics.

On March 30, 2009, underground Catholic bishop Jia Zhiguo was again detained in Hebei province. This was his 13th confrontation with police since 2004.

"There was no new information about unregistered Bishop Su Zhimin, who has been unaccounted for since his reported detention in 1997."

On March 24, 2009, Catholic priest Ma Shengbao was arrested. At the end of the reporting period, he had not been seen again. The whereabouts of Zhouzhi Bishop Wu Qijing remained unknown. Auxiliary Bishop of Xiwanzi diocese, Hebei Province, Yao Liang, remained in detention during the reporting period. Father Li Huisheng, whom police reportedly tortured in August 2006, remained in custody serving a seven-year term for "inciting the masses against the Government."

In March 2009, authorities in Hotan City, XUAR, closed at least seven religious schools and conducted house-to-house searches. At least 39 persons were arrested, and officials claimed to have seized books, propaganda material, and weapons. The Government also prosecuted individuals for taking part in "underground scripture readings."

The Government sought the forcible return from other countries of several Uighur Muslims, some of whom had reportedly protested limits on the Hajj and encouraged prayer and fasting by fellow Muslims. According to NGO reports in July 2007, Pakistan reportedly arrested and forcibly returned to the country Osman Alihan, a Uighur Muslim businessman who participated in protests against Hajj restrictions. That same month the Government of Saudi Arabia also reportedly arrested and forcibly returned Habibulla Ali, a Uighur Muslim who discussed the Hajj restrictions with other Uighur Muslims in Saudi Arabia, according to NGO reports.

According to Falun Gong practitioners abroad, since 1999 several hundreds of thousands of practitioners have been detained for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. The organization reported its members have been subject to excessive force, abuse, rape, detention, forcible psychiatric commitment and treatment (including involuntary medication and electric shock treatment), and torture, and that some members, including children, have died in custody. Practitioners who refused to recant their beliefs were sometimes subjected to extrajudicial "legal education" centers after the expiration of their criminal sentences. According to former RTL camp detainees, Falun Gong practitioners make up a significant percentage of the RTL camps' population.

Overseas Falun Gong organizations alleged a surge in arrests and deaths of Falun Gong practitioners carried out to prevent disturbances during the Olympic Games. They claimed that authorities arrested thousands of adherents and imprisoned hundreds, and that 100 practitioners died in 2008 as a result of persecution. Reports of abuse were difficult to confirm because the Government prevented Falun Gong members from meeting with foreign reporters and government officials. These organizations also reported that the Government harassed their members in other countries, including the United States, through threatening phone calls and physical harassment. The Government frequently used harsh rhetoric against Falun Gong. In May 2009, several attorneys who had represented Falun Gong practitioners did not have their licenses renewed by the Lawyers Associations in their localities.

In April 2009, Zhang Xingwu, a retired physics professor from Shandong Province, was sentenced to seven years in prison after police found Falun Gong literature in his apartment.

In November 2009, a Shanghai court sentenced Liu Jin to three and a half years in prison for downloading from the Internet and distributing to others information about Falun Gong.

In December 2009, Bu Dongwei left the country after serving two and a half years at a re-education through labor facility; he maintained that he was tortured because of his Falun Gong activities. Before his arrest, he worked for The Asia Foundation, a U.S.-based organization.

On August 8, 2008, Falun Gong practitioner Cao Changling disappeared while riding his bicycle. Two days later, his family was summoned to the Tenth Wuhan City Hospital, where they found him unconscious, with broken bones and bruises. Cao died on August 15 without regaining consciousness; his family maintained that the circumstances of the death were suspicious.

On January 26, 2008, Beijing police stopped musician Yu Zhou and his wife, poet Xu Na, for speeding. Police found Falun Gong materials in their car and detained the couple. Yu died in custody 11 days later. He was reportedly tortured; police refused to allow an autopsy. His wife was sentenced to three years in prison.

The Government designated North Korean citizens in the country "economic migrants" rather than refugees and forcibly returned them to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. According to reports from NGOs, refugees, defectors, and missionaries, individuals who were forcibly returned and found to have contacted foreigners, including Christian missionaries, were arrested and subjected to harsh punishment.

For a more detailed discussion, see the U.S. State Department's 2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in China and the 2009 International Religious Freedom Report on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Forced Religious Conversion

Falun Gong reported that detained practitioners were repeatedly subjected to various methods of physical and psychological coercion in attempts to force them to deny their belief in Falun Gong.

There were no other reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to emphasize the role of religion in promoting a "harmonious society." It allowed the PRAs to expand their cooperation with religious groups in other countries and funded the building of some new places for worship by registered religious groups. The Government granted approval for an increasing number of religious books to be published by officially approved publishers.

The Government stated in its new National Human Rights Action Plan that it would "encourage...and support...religious circles in launching social welfare programs [and] exploring methods and channels for religions to better serve society and promote the people's well-being."

In November 2008, the Development Research Committee of the State Council (which advises the CCP Central Committee and the State Council) held an unprecedented meeting with a delegation of house church leaders. The house church leaders requested registration independent of the PRAs. Chinese academics also urged the Government to allow independent registration. Observers in the country considered this an important first step in establishing relations between the Government and house churches.

The number of Christian websites on the Internet increased. The Government also allowed Wang Xiaochao, a philosopher at a Beijing university, to translate two major works of St. Augustine, *The Confessions* and *The City of God*, into Chinese directly from Latin. Other well-known Christian authors whose works are available in Chinese bookstores included C.S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and Rick Warren.

Following the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, the Government allowed several registered religious organizations to provide disaster relief. Amity Foundation, a state-approved Protestant-affiliated group registered as a national charity (and

entitled to receive tax-free charitable donations), helped to build homes and classrooms, grain storage facilities, and water supply lines. Amity also built a new Protestant church to replace one the earthquake destroyed. They reported that the congregation's membership was up from 180 to nearly 1,000 people. Amity's Catholic counterpart, Beifang Jinde Social Services Center in Hebei Province, which works in conjunction with Caritas, was also active in the quake zone, sending Catholic nuns with medical training to assist the survivors.

Sichuan-area officials also permitted many unregistered religious groups, including "house churches," to, as President Hu had earlier directed, "play an active role in promoting economic and social development" following the earthquake. Several unregistered groups, although lacking legal status, were nonetheless permitted to provide a broad range of social services to persons affected by the earthquake. However, some unregistered groups also reported that government officials prevented them from providing aid to earthquake survivors.

Several international religious organizations that cooperated with state-sanctioned organizations were permitted to provide aid to survivors. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) and Samaritan's Purse, both U.S.-based religious charities, sent a cargo jet loaded with supplies to the region immediately after the quake. In April 2009, BGEA shipped 65,000 "shoe box gifts" to Chengdu for distribution to children affected by the earthquake. The Tzu Chi Foundation, a Taiwan-based Buddhist organization that was officially recognized and registered as a charitable body in March 2008, sent medical aid, volunteers, and supplies to the afflicted area.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims, experienced societal discrimination because of their religious beliefs and their status as ethnic minorities with distinct languages and cultures. Conflicts among ethnic groups in Tibetan areas, including Han, Hui, Tibetan Buddhists, and Tibetan Muslims, escalated during the reporting period. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton attended services at a registered church during her visit to Beijing in February 2009. Speaker of the House of

Representatives Nancy Pelosi raised religious freedom concerns during her May 2009 visit to Shanghai. President George W. Bush raised religious freedom with the Government during his visit to Beijing in August 2008 and also attended worship at a registered church. In July 2008 President Bush met with Uighur Muslim activist Rebiya Kadeer and house church activist Bob Fu.

U.S. officials regularly raise religious freedom issues with government officials, including calling for the release of religious prisoners, reform of restrictive registration laws, and freedom for minority and banned religious groups to practice their faiths.

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan regularly urge the Government to implement greater religious freedom in the country. U.S. officials condemned abuses and supported positive trends. In exchanges with the Government, including religious affairs officials, U.S. representatives consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom and release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities.

U.S. officials protested vigorously when there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. On numerous occasions the Department of State, the Embassy, and the consulates general protested government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, and Catholic and Protestant clergy and lay persons. The Embassy routinely raised cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with appropriate government officials.

U.S. officials underscored to the Government that freedom of religion would strengthen, not harm, Chinese society. U.S. officials encouraged the Government to support the growth of faith-based aid by both legally registered and unregistered religious groups and to loosen government controls on religious practice.

The Embassy and consulates general also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of leaders within religious communities. The Department of State's nongovernmental contacts included Chinese academic experts on religion, human rights organizations, and religious groups in the United States.

The Department of State brought a number of religious leaders and scholars to the United States on International Visitor Leadership Programs to see firsthand the role religion plays in U.S. society.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in his public speeches and in his private diplomacy with senior officials. Officials from the Embassy and consulates general met with government officials responsible for religion and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups.

Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The most recent re-designation as a CPC was on January 16, 2009. Economic measures in effect against the country under the IRFA relate to restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101-246).

COLOMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There is no state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Terrorist organizations, especially the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), killed, kidnapped, and extorted religious leaders and practitioners, inhibiting free religious expression. Terrorist organizations generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political rather than religious reasons. The National Liberation Army (ELN) continued threatening members of religious organizations but generally adhered to its agreement to cease killing religious leaders. Former United Self-Defense Forces (AUC) members that refused to demobilize and new criminal groups, including the *Aguilas Negras*, also targeted representatives and members of religious organizations. Some indigenous leaders reportedly were intolerant of nonsyncretic forms of worship.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 439,735 square miles and a population of 45 million. The Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation, and estimates from religious leaders varied. According to the Colombian Evangelical Council (CEDECOL), approximately 15 percent of the population is Protestant, while the Catholic Bishops' Conference estimates that 90 percent of the population is Catholic. A 2007 article in the daily newspaper *El Tiempo* claims that 80 percent of the population is Catholic, although not all are practicing; 13.5 percent of the population belongs to non-Catholic Christian groups, 2 percent is agnostic, and the remaining 4.5 percent belongs to other religious groups, such as Islam and Judaism. Other membership estimates include Seventh-day Adventists, 261,000; Anglicans and Presbyterians, 50,000 each; Methodists, 1,500; other Protestants and evangelicals, 5 million; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

(Mormons), 150,000; Muslims, 10,000; and Jews, 5,000. Practitioners of animism and various syncretic beliefs are also present.

Adherents of some religious groups are concentrated in certain geographical regions. For example, the vast majority of practitioners of syncretic beliefs that blend Catholicism with elements of African animism are Afro-Colombian residents of the western department of Choco. Jews are found in major cities, Muslims on the Caribbean coast, and adherents of indigenous animistic religions in remote, rural areas. A small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous region of Santander Department.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Constitution states that there is no official church or religion, but adds that the State "is not atheist or agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment." Some interpret this to mean that the state unofficially sanctions a privileged position for Catholicism, which was the official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. A 1973 concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains in effect, although some of its articles are unenforceable because of constitutional provisions on freedom of religion. A 1994 constitutional court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to a religious characterization of the country.

The Government observes Epiphany, Saint Joseph Day, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, the Ascension, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart Day, Saints Peter and Paul Day, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religious organizations: recognition as a legal entity (*personeria juridica*), and special public recognition as a religious entity. Although the application process is often lengthy, the Ministry of Interior and Justice (MOIJ) readily grants the former recognition; the only legal requirements are submission of a formal request and basic organizational information. In addition, any foreign religious group that wishes to

establish a presence must document official recognition by authorities in its home country. The MOIJ may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights. Some non-Catholic religious leaders complained that their applications were unnecessarily delayed and that their petitions for recognition as legal entities were denied for trivial reasons. They stated that for this reason some non-Catholic religious groups chose not to apply for legal recognition and instead operated as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or as informal religious entities.

Since 1995 the MOIJ has approved 1,182 applications for special public recognition as a religious entity; an estimated 90 percent of the approvals were for evangelical churches. According to the MOIJ, 1,859 applications failed to meet constitutionally established requirements and thus were not approved. In cases in which individual churches or schools affiliated with a nationally registered church applied separately for special public recognition, the Government granted those organizations affiliate or associate status. More than 40 churches asked the Government to sponsor legislation establishing less exacting standards for special public recognition, formally codifying religious freedoms provided in the Constitution, and creating a special office for religious affairs. Although the MOIJ has statutory authority over recognizing religious entities, there is no government agency to monitor or enforce laws governing religious freedom.

Accession to a 1997 public law agreement between the state and non-Catholic religious groups is required for such organizations to minister to their adherents in public institutions such as hospitals or prisons, provide chaplaincy services and religious instruction in public schools, and perform marriages recognized by the state. When deciding whether to grant accession to the 1997 agreement, the Government considers a religious group's total membership, its degree of acceptance within society, and other relevant factors, such as the content of the organization's statutes and its required behavioral norms. At the end of the reporting period, 13 non-Catholic churches had been granted accession. No non-Christian religious group was a signatory to the 1997 public law agreement. Some prominent non-Christian religious groups, such as the Jewish community, chose not to accede to the 1997 public law, declaring that the agreement was designed for Protestant groups. Many churches that are signatories reported that some local authorities failed to comply with the accord.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations issues visas to foreign missionaries and administrators of religious groups that received special public recognition. Foreign missionaries are required to possess a special visa, valid for up to two years.

Applicants must have a certificate from the MOIJ confirming that their religious group is registered with the Ministry or a certificate issued by the Catholic archdiocese. Alternatively, they may produce a certificate issued by the religious organization confirming the applicant's membership and mission in the country, as well as a letter issued by a legal representative of the religious organization stating that the organization accepts full financial responsibility for the expenses of the applicant and his family, including return to their country of origin or last country of residence. In both cases, applicants must explain the purpose of the proposed sojourn and provide proof of economic means. The Government generally permits missionaries to proselytize among the indigenous population, provided that the indigenous group welcomes proselytization and visitors do not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands. The Supreme Court stipulated that no group may force religious conversion on members of indigenous communities.

The Constitution recognizes the right of parents to choose the type of education their children receive, including religious instruction. It also states that no student shall be forced to receive religious education in public schools. Religious groups that have not acceded to the public law agreement may establish their own schools, provided they comply with Ministry of Education requirements. For example, the Jewish community operates its own schools. The Catholic Church has an agreement with the Government to provide education in rural areas that have no state-operated schools. These schools are tax-exempt. Leaders of non-Catholic religious groups claimed that local authorities in many municipalities did not grant their schools the same tax-exempt status enjoyed by Catholic schools. These leaders also alleged that a decree by the Minister of Education to include education about religion in public schools was interpreted in many municipalities as a mandate to teach about Catholicism only, while offering no alternative instruction to students of other religious groups. CEDECOL, however, noted significant progress, and that problems remained only in rural areas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Although the 1991 Constitution mandates separation of church and state, the Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status. Accession to the 1997 public law agreement is required for non-Catholic groups to minister to military

personnel, public hospital patients, and prisoners, and to provide religious instruction in public schools. Muslim and Protestant leaders claimed difficulties in acquiring military chaplain positions and gaining access to prisoners.

The state recognizes as legally binding only those religious marriages celebrated by the Catholic Church and the 13 non-Catholic religious organizations that are signatories to the 1997 public law agreement, as well as religious groups with an associate status. Members of religious groups that are neither signatories to the agreement nor associates must marry in a civil ceremony in order for the state to recognize the marriage. Some signatories to the agreement complained of discrimination at the local level, such as refusal by municipal authorities to recognize marriages performed by these groups.

CEDECOL claimed that two state-operated television channels refused to allow evangelical groups to buy or receive airtime, while the Catholic Church received one minute of airtime daily without cost.

All legally recognized churches, seminaries, monasteries, and convents are exempt from national and local taxes and customs duties; however, CEDECOL claimed that this was not respected in practice and that reportedly municipal governments required some non-Catholic religious groups to pay property and other local taxes on their places of worship and schools. According to a 2006 article in the daily newspaper *El Espectador*, the Treasury Department issued a decree requiring all non-Catholic places of worship to pay a 4 percent tax on all tithes, offerings, and charitable contributions. According to CEDECOL, non-Catholic missionaries and religious leaders must also pay a 17 percent tax on all financial assistance received from abroad.

In 2006 the Bogotá municipal government passed a city planning ordinance that restricted the number of churches in residential areas and imposed stringent building codes on church facilities. The city granted congregations until 2015 to implement fire safety, disabled access, and other security standards. The Executive Secretary of CEDECOL stated that the ordinance was a positive step and did not show favoritism toward the Catholic Church. He added that Catholic churches are usually older and are exempt from some of the standards due to their historical and architectural status.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U. S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Religious leaders and practitioners were the targets of threats and kidnappings by guerrilla groups, former AUC members that refused to demobilize, and new criminal groups, generally for political or financial rather than religious reasons. These groups were responsible for the majority of such attacks and threats, killing, kidnapping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression.

The Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office continued to investigate the killings in past years of 14 members of the clergy believed to have been targeted because they were outspoken critics of terrorist organizations. The Presidential Program for Human Rights reported that nearly all killings of priests by terrorist groups could be attributed to leftist guerrillas, particularly the FARC. Catholic and Protestant church leaders noted that killings of religious leaders in rural communities were generally underreported because of the communities' isolation and fear of retribution. Religious leaders generally chose not to seek government protection because of their pacifist beliefs and fear of retribution from terrorist groups. A human rights organization affiliated with the Mennonite church, Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (Justapaz), and CEDECOL claimed that guerrillas, former AUC members that refused to demobilize, and new criminal groups equally committed violence against evangelical church leaders. New criminal groups, including the New Bolivarian Self-Defense Forces and the Aguilas Negras, targeted human rights organizations. Religious workers involved in human rights activities received death threats.

Most religious groups reported that due to threats from guerrillas, former AUC members that refused to demobilize, and new criminal groups, many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the internal conflict. Illegal armed groups, especially the FARC, threatened or attacked religious officials for opposing the forced recruitment of minors, promoting human rights, assisting internally displaced persons, and discouraging coca cultivation. The Catholic Bishops' Conference also reported that guerrillas, former AUC members that refused to demobilize, and new criminal groups issued death threats against rural priests who spoke out against them. In response to such threats, some religious leaders relocated to other communities.

Guerrillas, former AUC members that refused to demobilize, and new criminal groups harassed some indigenous groups that practiced animistic or syncretic religions; however, such harassment appeared generally motivated by political or economic differences (whether real or perceived) or by questions of land ownership rather than by religious concerns.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The Catholic Church and some evangelical churches reported that some indigenous leaders were intolerant of nonsyncretic forms of worship.

A number of faith-based NGOs promoted human rights, social and economic development, and a negotiated settlement to the internal armed conflict. The most influential of these organizations were either affiliated with the Catholic Church or founded by church officials. The Catholic Church was the only institutional presence in many rural areas and its Social Pastoral Agency conducted important social work.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained regular communication with representatives of the Catholic Church and other religious groups.

UNION OF THE COMOROS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, but the Penal Code prohibits proselytizing for religions other than Islam. A constitutional referendum passed on May 17, 2009, states that "Islam is the state religion."

The Government prohibited Christians from proselytizing. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There continued to be societal discrimination against non-Muslim citizens, particularly Christians and those who converted from Islam.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 838 square miles and a population of 732,000. Ninety-nine percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Foreigners living on the islands number several hundred and include Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, and Protestants.

A few foreign religious groups operate humanitarian programs, but by agreement with the Government, they do not engage in proselytizing.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

While the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, it also states that citizens will draw governing principles and rules from Islamic tenets. Proselytizing for any religion except Islam is illegal, and converts from Islam may be prosecuted under the law. However, such prosecutions are rare and have not resulted in any convictions in recent years.

A constitutional referendum passed on May 17, 2009 states that "Islam is the state religion," but in practice there was no change in the legal status of religious

freedom. Foreigners caught proselytizing for religions other than Islam are subject to deportation.

Nominated by the President, the Grand Mufti is part of the Government and manages issues concerning religion and religious administration. The Grand Mufti's position is attached to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and he counsels the Government on matters of Islamic faith and Islamic law. The Grand Mufti periodically consults with a group of elders to assess whether the principles of Islam are respected, and he regularly addresses the country on the radio regarding social and religious issues such as marriage, divorce, and education.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, and the Islamic New Year.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed, registered, or officially recognized.

While the study of Islam is not compulsory in public schools, the tenets of Islam are sometimes taught in conjunction with Arabic in public schools at the middle school level. There are no provisions made for religious education for religious minorities in public schools; however, foreigners can request that their children not receive Islamic instruction or Arabic language training. Almost all children between the ages of four and seven attend schools to learn to recite and understand the Qur'an.

The Government funds the country's only public university to ensure the availability of local educational opportunities, and in part due to concerns that youth who have studied abroad in countries with stricter Islamic traditions will return home and impose these traditions on their families and friends.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government prohibited Christians from proselytizing. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Although the Government allows organized religious groups to establish places of worship, train clergy to serve believers, and assemble for peaceful religious activities, most non-Muslim citizens did not openly practice their faith for fear of potential legal repercussions for proselytizing.

The Government occasionally enforced bans on alcohol and immodest dress, particularly during Ramadan.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There continued to be discrimination against non-Muslim citizens, particularly Christians and those who converted from Islam. Non-Muslim citizens face intense societal pressure to refrain from religious practice; however, non-Muslim foreigners encountered little to no discrimination. All citizens faced pressure to practice elements of Islam, particularly during Ramadan.

Most societal pressure and discrimination occurred behind closed doors at the village level. In the past, there were reports of family and community members excluding non-Muslim converts from schools or villages for "evangelizing Muslims;" however, no such incidents were recorded during this reporting period. The extent of de facto discrimination typically depended on the influence of local teachers of Islam. Societal pressure and intimidation continued to restrict the use of the country's three churches to noncitizens.

Government authorities closed the case of the April 2008 vandalism of the Church of Moroni after they were unable to determine who wrote obscene graffiti on the church's outer walls.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. To demonstrate support for religious pluralism, the Ambassador held a program for more than 100 students at the American Corner on "Islam in America," including a film and presentation on Muslim communities in the United States. Embassy officers frequently hold

discussion group meetings on religious tolerance with religious leaders and other community members.

The Ambassador regularly raised the importance of religious freedom and concern over Islamic fundamentalism's impact on religious expression in meetings with government officials, including President Sambi. Embassy officers raised concern with the country's officials that prohibitions on religious conversion violated international human rights norms.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, there continued to be credible reports that families abandoned or abused persons, including children, accused of witchcraft or of being witches.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 905,000 square miles and a population of 68.7 million. The population is approximately 50 percent Roman Catholic, 20 percent mainline Protestant, 9 percent Kimbanguist, and 9 percent Muslim. Other religious groups represented in much smaller numbers include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Orthodox Christians. The remainder generally practices indigenous religious beliefs.

Most religious groups are scattered throughout the country and are widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims are mainly concentrated in the provinces of Maniema, Orientale, and Kinshasa. Members of the ethnically based spiritual and political movement Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) reside predominantly in Bas-Congo Province; BDK has never attempted to gain official recognition as a religious association.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The

law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes Christmas as a national holiday.

A statutory order on the Regulation of Nonprofit Associations and Public Utilities provides for and regulates the establishment and operation of religious institutions. Requirements for the establishment of a religious organization are simple and generally are not subject to abuse. Exemption from taxation is among the benefits granted to recognized religious organizations. A law regulating religious organizations grants civil servants the power to recognize, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. Although the law requires officially recognized religious associations to maintain nonprofit status and respect the general public order, they are free to establish places of worship and train clergy.

A 2001 decree allows nonprofit organizations, including religious organizations, to operate without restriction provided they register with the Government by submitting a copy of their bylaws and constitution. The Government requires religious groups to be registered; however, in practice unregistered religious groups operated unhindered.

The Government requires foreign religious groups to obtain the approval of the President through the Minister of Justice; such groups generally operate without restriction once they receive approval.

Public schools permit religious instruction, and religious groups operate many public schools.

The National Media Regulatory Authority may suspend broadcast stations, religious or secular, for hate speech or calls for ethnic violence.

The Government regularly consulted with religious groups--including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Kimbanguist, and Orthodox. The Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders served as an informal forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although the Government committed to a judicial investigation, there was no investigation into the police crackdown on the BDK in Bas-Congo in February and March 2008, where police reportedly killed at least 100 BDK adherents and razed BDK houses and temples.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country. However, the Government continued to hold Father Masirika, a Catholic priest, in prison in Kinshasa without trial on charges of participating in an insurrection movement.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, many families continued to accuse children and elderly persons of being witches and forced them from their homes.

As in past reporting periods, there were reports of incidents of individuals attacked, tortured, killed, or driven from their homes when they were accused of being witches. While "witch" is an imprecise term that is often applied to persons with developmental, behavioral, and psychological problems, there is a common belief that some persons have the power to cast spells on others or are possessed by demons. Such actions commonly follow a death that family members attribute to the work of a witch. Accusations of witchcraft can cause widespread fear in a community. For example, in September 2008 a fight broke out at a soccer match in Butembo, North Kivu Province, over allegations that players were using witchcraft. The fight spread to the stands, and after the police tried to intervene, 11 persons died in the resulting stampede.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 132,000 square miles and a population of 3.8 million. Approximately one-half of citizens are Christian. An estimated 90 percent of Christians are Roman Catholic; others include Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is a growing Muslim community, estimated at 2 percent of the population. Most Muslim workers in urban centers are immigrants from West Africa, Lebanon, and North Africa. The West African Muslim immigrants arrived mainly from Mali, Benin, Togo, Mauritania, and Senegal. The Lebanese are primarily Sunni Muslims. There is also a significant Chadian Muslim population.

The remainder of the population is made up of practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs, those who belong to various messianic groups, and those who practice no religion. A small minority of Christians practice Kimbanguism, a syncretistic movement that originated in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool region) have been associated with opposition political movements, including some elements of the armed insurrection in the southern part of the country from 1997 to 2003.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution specifically forbids discrimination on the basis of religion.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the Government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups; however, the process is time-consuming. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners; no criminal penalties are applicable. Even after groups have registered, it is not uncommon for police or other governmental officials to summon leaders or organizers, request information about the group, and assess a fee of \$48 (20,000 FCFA) in order to process requested materials. However, there were no reports of religious groups being singled out in this process during the reporting period.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. Islamic holy days are not nationally observed; however, they are respected. For example, employers grant leave for those who wish to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

Religion is not taught in public schools; however, private religious schools devote class time to religious studies.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In some forest communities where there are pygmy populations, there was some discrimination against them in education and employment as well as intolerance for their cultural practices, including at times their animist religious practices.

A joint ecumenical council, which met in January 2009, represented all organized religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions included highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly.

COSTA RICA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 19,730 square miles and a population of 4.5 million, according to the National Institute of Census and Statistics. The most recent countrywide survey of religion, conducted in 2008 by the University of Costa Rica, found that 43.3 percent of the population identify themselves as practicing Roman Catholics, 31.2 percent nonpracticing Catholics, 15.2 percent evangelical Protestants, 5.7 percent report no religious affiliation, and 4.4 percent declare "another religion."

Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Baptist, and other Protestant groups have significant membership. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claims membership of 35,000 and has a temple in San Jose that serves the country and Panama. The Lutheran Church estimates it has 5,500 members in 30 communities (1,320 active members), and the Jewish Zionist Center of Costa Rica estimates there are 2,500 Orthodox Jews and 300 Reform Jews. An estimated 1,000 Quakers are found in the cloud forest reserve of Monteverde, Puntarenas, and an additional 1,000 attend Quaker meetings as nonmembers throughout the country. Although they represent fewer than 1 percent of the population, Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong presence on the Caribbean coast. Seventh-day Adventists operate a university that attracts students from throughout the Caribbean Basin. The Unification Church has its continental headquarters for Latin America in San Jose. Other groups, including followers of Islam, Taoism, Krishna Consciousness,

Scientology, Tenrikyo, and the Baha'i Faith, claim membership throughout the country, with the majority of worshippers residing in the Central Valley (the area that includes San Jose). While there is no general correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity, indigenous peoples are more likely to practice animism than other religions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Article 75 of the Constitution provides the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government generally observed and enforced this provision. In the event of a violation of religious freedom, a victim may file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court. A victim may also file a motion before the Constitutional Chamber to have a statute or regulation declared unconstitutional. Additionally, a victim may appeal to the administrative court for permission to sue the Government for alleged discriminatory acts. Laws are generally applied and enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion. Legal protections cover discrimination by private actors.

The Constitution establishes Catholicism as the state religion and requires that the state contribute to its maintenance. The Constitution also prohibits the state from impeding the free exercise of other religions that do not impugn universal morality or proper behavior. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion is responsible for managing the Government's relationship with the Catholic Church and other religious groups. The Ministry included funding in its annual budget for maintenance and repairs of some Catholic churches during the reporting period. The Catholic Church receives exemptions from income and real estate taxes.

The law allows the Government to provide land to the Catholic Church. This practice was established in part to restore land the Government seized from the Church during the 19th century. Land conveyance takes two forms: right of development grants with ownership retained by the state; and outright title grants, a method commonly used to provide land for the construction of local churches. These methods do not meet all the needs of the Church, which also buys some land. Government-to-church land transfers are not covered under any blanket legislation but by specific legislative action, typically once or twice per year. The

latest legislative action, in 2007, provided for land to be donated by a local municipality to the Catholic Church for new church construction.

Besides notaries public, only officials of the Catholic Church can perform marriages that are automatically recognized by the state. Other religious groups can perform wedding ceremonies, but the marriage must then be legalized via a civil union. Couples may also choose to have a civil ceremony only.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Our Lady of Los Angeles Day (August 2), and Christmas as national holidays. However, the labor code provides the necessary flexibility for observance of a different religious holy day upon the employer's approval.

To address the separation of church and state, the Constitution establishes that the president, vice president, cabinet members, and Supreme Court justices may not be Catholic clergy; however, clergy may serve in other political offices. The Supreme Elections Tribunal upheld the position that the prohibition against serving in these high-level public offices did not apply to non-Catholic clergy.

The Government does not require religious groups to register, nor does it inhibit the establishment of religious groups through taxation or special licensing requirements. According to the Law of Associations, a group with a minimum of 10 persons may incorporate as an association with juridical status (*personeria juridica*) by registering with the Public Registry of the Ministry of Justice. Religious groups, as any other association, must register with the Public Registry to engage in any type of fundraising activity. They must be accredited with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion to be eligible for temporary residency for their foreign missionaries and employees, and to petition for legal recognition of religious holidays.

Some non-Catholic leaders believed that the Law of Associations was not adequate for religious groups since it allowed them to register only in the same manner as businesses, sports groups, or other kinds of associations. They would prefer registration specifically for religious groups, thereby facilitating church construction and operation, event organizing permits, and pastoral access to hospitals and jails.

In 2006 an immigration law was passed that changed certain procedures for missionaries and other religious workers seeking temporary residency. Under regulations enacted to implement the 2006 law, religious workers must apply for

temporary residency before arrival rather than entering as tourists and changing status. The 2006 law requires foreign religious workers to belong to a religious organization accredited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion. Article 75 of the 2006 Immigration Law stipulates that Immigration may grant authorization for religious workers to enter and stay in the country for at least 90 days but not more than two years.

In 2006 and 2007, representatives of the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Evangelical Alliance Federation signed bilateral agreements with the Government that allowed them to present applications for temporary residency for their personnel directly to Immigration once missionaries arrived in the country. In 2007 Immigration published a guideline to extend benefits to other religious groups. An immigration official reportedly was assigned to receive applications from religious organizations; however, according to the Evangelical Alliance Federation, the process continued to take several months. One religious leader maintained that of 159 Evangelical Alliance Federation files presented to Immigration for permits during the reporting period, 84 cases were approved, 69 were denied, and six remained pending. Other non-Catholic leaders reported that they had not experienced problems with temporary residency applications.

The 2007 executive decree that provides a legal framework for religious organizations to establish churches and other places of worship remained in effect. Religious organizations must submit applications to the local municipality to establish a place of worship and comply with safety and noise regulations as established by the General Health Law. The 2007 executive decree grants existing churches a grace period to update facilities to comply.

The Evangelical Alliance Federation asserted that the Ministry of Health continued to close churches without complying with the executive order and reported seven of its churches closed during the reporting period. According to the Federation, noise pollution and lack of municipal permits (related to the land-use law) were the main reasons for church closures. Other non-Catholic leaders did not complain of church closings, attributing the differences to location or to their quieter services.

The Government, through the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), provides subsidies to private schools (both Catholic and non-Catholic) so they can reduce tuition. A subsidy can be direct placement of a teacher, provision of a teacher's salary, or other monetary support.

Catholic religious instruction (catechesis) is provided in public schools; however, it is not mandatory. According to the education code as upheld by the Supreme Court, the Catholic Church has sole authority to select teachers of religion (catechists) for the public school system, including employment and dismissal authority. The Church maintains an office within the MEP expressly for this function. According to the Department of Religious Education of the MEP, only Catholic university graduates are eligible to teach religion in public schools. Religious education teachers in public schools must be certified by the Catholic Bishops' Conference. According to the education code and constitutional jurisprudence, students may obtain exemptions from religious education with the permission of their parents, and the Department of Religious Education estimated that 14 percent of students chose this option. The school director, the student's parents, and the student's teacher must agree on an alternative course of instruction for the exempted student during religious instruction time. Some non-Catholic leaders complained that exemptions sometimes required a letter from the child's pastor also, and that occasionally students were required to remain in the classroom while Catholic doctrine was taught, in some cases due to lack of resources for alternate activities.

On September 2, 2008, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a non-Catholic student who argued that a private Catholic school discriminated against her and denied her admission for the following year. In its ruling, the Court established that private schools cannot condition admittance on religious beliefs and ordered the private school to exempt the student from attending religion classes.

Private schools are free to offer any religious instruction they choose. Parents do not have the option of homeschooling their children.

On December 19, 2008, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a student whose school had a uniform policy requiring all students to wear trousers and prohibiting girls from wearing skirts. In accordance with her religious beliefs and practices, the Chamber ordered the school to allow her to attend classes wearing a skirt.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Jewish Community Center reported that some (approximately 10 in six months) observant Jews wearing a skullcap received verbal abuse in public during the reporting period. Additionally, there continued to be reports of occasional instances of anti-Semitic graffiti in San Jose.

Some non-Catholic leaders reported difficulties with the implementation of a 2003 executive order allowing non-Catholic pastors access to public hospitals and prisons. They maintained that public hospital and prison security staff continued to deny entry to non-Catholic pastors due to unfamiliarity with the executive order or failure to comply. The Evangelical Alliance Federation confirmed the case of a pastor who was initially denied access to a major public hospital until he raised the issue of the decree with the guard. The Lutheran bishop noted that it was often difficult for his pastors to gain access. Catholic clergy and chaplains also reported being denied entrance to public hospitals after visiting hours.

The Catholic Church met periodically with other religious groups through the Ecumenical Affairs Committee of the Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Commission on Interfaith Dialogue. Non-governmental organizations, including the Jewish-Christian Confraternity and the Costa Rican-Jewish Cultural Institute, promoted religious understanding.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives had regular

contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion's Director of Religion. The Embassy also maintained contact with the Catholic archbishop and dioceses, as well as with other religious leaders, to discuss specific concerns.

COTE D'IVOIRE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Some interreligious tension among Catholics, Muslims, followers of indigenous beliefs, and evangelical Protestants continued with each group feeling disadvantaged vis-à-vis the others. However, religious leaders made concerted efforts to encourage interfaith dialogue.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials regularly met with a broad range of civil society groups that promote religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 124,500 square miles and a population of 18 million. An estimated 35 to 40 percent of the population is Christian and an equal percentage is Muslim; an estimated 25 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs. Many persons who are nominally Christian or Muslim also practice some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Traditionally, the north is associated with Islam and the south with Christianity, although practitioners of both religions live throughout the country. The political crisis that began in 2002 displaced over 700,000 persons internally, many to a different region. In general, political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic and socioeconomic lines.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, Southern Baptists, Coptics, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Other religious groups include Buddhists, Baha'is, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Bossonists, who follow a traditional practice of the Akan ethnic group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Although there is no state religion, the country's first two presidents were Catholic. For this reason, the Government has historically favored Christianity, particularly Catholicism.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost Monday, Lailat al-Qadr, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Muslims are underrepresented in official positions, including in the civil service. Muslims are also underrepresented in state-supported media outlets, particularly radio and television stations.

The law requires all religious groups to register with the Government. Groups must submit an application to the Ministry of Interior's Department of Faith-Based Organizations. This application must include the group's bylaws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding (or the date on which the founder received the revelation of his or her calling), and general assembly minutes. The Ministry of Interior investigates the organization to ensure that the group has no politically subversive members or purpose.

The Department of Faith-Based Organizations is responsible for promoting religious freedom and official secularism in the country. It funds construction at religious sites and travel for religious pilgrimages.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Although religious leaders criticized the Government without recourse or retaliation, some religious groups complained that the Government did not allow all religious groups equal access to national media outlets, including state-run television and radio.

Many northern Muslims continued to feel discriminated against when applying for certificates of nationality and passports, despite the Government's continued efforts to issue replacement birth certificates and to ensure that citizens lacking identification documents could register to vote.

Some Muslim organizations viewed the Government's organizational requirements for Hajj trips to Saudi Arabia as unnecessary and unwarranted interference in religious affairs. Although less publicized, the Government also funded some pilgrimage trips by Catholics. The Government's role in determining which groups received subsidies for their religious trips remained a highly charged political decision.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of indigenous religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Other groups, particularly evangelical Christians, complained that some government officials discriminated and perpetrated sectarian hostility at the local level. The ongoing political crisis caused some divisions along ethnic and religious lines.

Religious leaders continued to organize public interfaith activities during the reporting period, issuing joint statements to promote national reconciliation, elections, and tolerance.

The Forum of Religious Confessions promoted dialogue and improved relationships among religious leaders and groups. The Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace promoted similar goals and included evangelical churches that had previously refused to join the Forum.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials regularly met with a broad range of civil society groups that promote religious tolerance.

From June 11-17, 2009, the Embassy hosted an American imam who spoke to groups in Abidjan, Bouake, and Yamoussoukro about religious tolerance in the United States.

On March 12, 2009, the Embassy coordinated a web chat between Muslim businesswomen and student leaders and Muslim women in America that highlighted religious freedom and tolerance in the United States.

On January 29, 2009, the Embassy hosted a well-attended book program on world religions and democracy. Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders discussed how fundamental democratic values are reflected in different religions.

On January 21, 2009, the Embassy hosted a program focused on religious tolerance and Muslim communities in the United States. The program included more than 600 participants, including Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders, and was featured on national television.

During the reporting period, the Embassy also distributed more than 600 copies of a State Department publication "Muslims in America" and 300 copies of another entitled "Freedom of Faith."

CROATIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were reports of sporadic vandalism, particularly in the war-affected areas, directed against Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) property.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 21,831 square miles and a population of 4.5 million. Approximately 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent is Serbian Orthodox Christian. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, Jews, and followers of other religions. Religious affiliation correlates closely with the country's ethnic makeup. The Serbian Orthodox, predominantly ethnic Serbs associated with the SPC, live primarily in cities and areas bordering Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro. Most members of other minority religious groups reside in urban areas. Most immigrants are Roman Catholic ethnic Croats from Bosnia.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives state financial support and other benefits established in concordats between the Government and the Vatican. The concordats and other government agreements with non-Roman Catholic religious communities allow state financing for some

salaries and pensions for religious officials through government-managed pension and health funds. Marriages conducted by the religious communities having agreements with the state are officially recognized, eliminating the need to register the marriages in the civil registry office. The concordats and agreements also regulate public school catechisms and military chaplains.

In line with the concordats signed with the Roman Catholic Church and in an effort to define further their rights and privileges within a legal framework, the Government has additional agreements with the following 15 religious communities: the SPC, Islamic Community of Croatia, Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Pentecostal Church, Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, Christian Adventist Church, Union of Baptist Churches, Church of God, Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement, Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, Croatian Old Catholic Church, and Bet Israel Jewish Community.

The Coordinating Committee of Jewish Communities (CCJC) continued to seek a similar agreement with the state. In May 2008 the Government offered a joint agreement to the CCJC and Bet Israel. Bet Israel signed the agreement on October 24, 2008. However, the CCJC declined the Government's offer, insisting on an independent agreement. The CCJC also objected to the distribution of government funding to the communities, arguing that the smaller Bet Israel received disproportionately more funding than the larger CCJC. The CCJC's refusal to sign the agreement did not affect the funding provided to Bet Israel.

The Government observes Epiphany, Easter Monday, Corpus Christi Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (Boxing Day) as national holidays.

The law requires a group to have at least 500 members and to have been registered as an association for at least five years to be registered as a religious community. Registered communities have legal personality and enjoy tax and other benefits. Religious communities existing in the country prior to the passage of the law in 2003, however, did not have to meet these criteria. A total of 42 religious communities were registered, while requests for registration of another 18 have been pending for years because authorities alleged they did not meet the legal criteria. The Croatian Helsinki Committee and several smaller religious groups that were registered but unable to sign an agreement with the state criticized criteria for signing such agreements and claimed that authorities applied them inconsistently.

The law broadly defines religious communities' legal positions and covers such matters as government funding, tax benefits, and religious education in schools. Matters such as pensions for clergy; religious service in the military, penitentiaries, and police; and recognition of religious marriages are left to each religious community to negotiate separately with the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

SPC officials reported that they had access to hospitals and prisons to provide pastoral care but continued to complain of difficulties assessing the level of need for Serbian Orthodox religious care in both the military and the police structures.

The Law on Foreigners, which came into effect in January 2008, limits foreign citizens to a maximum six-month stay, which then must be followed by six months outside the country. Many categories of citizens are exempt from the six-month maximum stay, but clergy initially were not a part of this group. In 2008 SPC representatives expressed concern that the law could potentially affect as many as half of their priests. A dozen of the 54 Muslim imams in the country were affected as well. Five other religious communities, including the Islamic Community, joined the SPC in March 2008 to propose amendments to the law, suggesting a separate status for clergy, an extension of temporary stay, and a streamlined procedure for obtaining temporary and permanent residence permits. On March 31, 2009, Parliament passed amendments to the Law on Foreigners listing clergy among the favored category, granting them the right of temporary residence and more favorable conditions for renewing permits. Both the SPC and the Islamic Community believed it was too early to tell whether the amendments would be properly implemented, although neither community reported problems with renewing residency permits during the reporting period.

The Government requires that religious training be provided in public schools, although attendance is optional. The Roman Catholic catechism is the predominant religious teaching offered in public schools. Schools that met the necessary quota of seven students of a minority religious group per school allowed separate religion classes for the students. The SPC complained in 2008 that primary and secondary schools were issued enrollment questionnaires in 2007

asking students if they were interested in attending religious classes; however, the questionnaires allegedly mentioned only Catholic classes. SPC representatives requested that their faith be mentioned as an option as well. SPC officials reported that the Ministry of Education subsequently sent a letter to schools instructing them to offer other options; however, implementation varied, and many schools failed to offer other options to students enrolling in September 2008.

SPC officials continued to report that many schoolchildren and their parents, particularly in cities where Serbian Orthodox believers do not live in compact communities, remained reluctant to identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox to avoid being singled out. Nevertheless, SPC officials continued to report a stable situation and an increase of students attending such classes in areas with Serb majorities or in areas where classes were already well established. However, the Eparchy of Dalmatia reported problems with two primary schools in Knin that limited the number of religious classes for Serb Orthodox children.

The Islamic Community reported that some women continued to face obstacles when attempting to obtain identity cards with photographs in which they were wearing a headscarf. The law allows local police to determine their own policies on details related to identity card issuance.

At the end of the reporting period, no national agreement or unified policy regarding an interim arrangement for maintenance of Jewish graves in Zagreb had been created. No change to the practice whereby heirless graves can be disinterred after 30 years had been made. In the first half of 2008, government officials agreed to pursue solutions to the two issues.

Restitution of property nationalized or confiscated by the Yugoslav communist regime remained a problem. Many religious communities identified property return as their top priority and complained of the lack of progress. Restitution of all nationalized or confiscated property is regulated under a 1996 law, amended in 2002.

The SPC noted that the pace of property restitution continued to be minimal at best. The SPC continued to press for changes to the 1996 law, which the SPC alleged opened the possibility for the Government to resell previously nationalized property to new private owners, making restitution more difficult.

SPC officials remained particularly concerned about the lack of progress in the restitution of several valuable business and residential buildings in downtown

Zagreb, most notably the Zagreb Cinema building. In November 2008 the building was demolished and construction of a shopping mall and car park began, despite the fact that a 2007 SPC appeal before the European Court of Human Rights remained pending.

The SPC also continued legal action initiated in 2004 against the owners of 40 previously SPC-owned (and later nationalized) apartments in Zagreb to prevent further sale of the units. The SPC also claimed land in the north of Zagreb. No progress was made during the reporting period on these claims or on the return of properties that belonged to monasteries, such as arable land and forests. In early 2008 the SPC discovered that the state allegedly erroneously registered several church properties in the land registry books during the mid-1990s as its own. The SPC filed five lawsuits to reclaim five properties located near Koprivnica and in Graberje near Zagreb. No progress was made on the five cases during the reporting period; however, additional cases were found, bringing the total number of such cases to ten.

Reconstruction of a number of Serbian Orthodox churches continued, but progress was slow.

The Catholic Church was able to regain most of its major properties, apart from significant amounts of land in the southern part of Zagreb, where large residential settlements were built, and a Jesuit monastery in Varazdin. The monastery housed an information technology faculty and was to be restituted pending completion of a new university campus in the city. Church officials reported that the Government was willing to settle any outstanding claims and noted that in the majority of smaller dioceses, most property claims had been settled, but in larger dioceses with more claims, such as Zagreb and Djakovo, restitution of some properties was pending.

Several Jewish property claims, including some buildings in Zagreb, remained pending during the reporting period.

The Islamic Community had no property claims. Construction was initially scheduled to start on a mosque in Rijeka in mid-2008, but plans were delayed, and construction was postponed to October 2009. Plans existed to build a mosque in Osijek, but administrative procedures for rezoning the land delayed construction. The Community also bought land to construct a mosque in Sisak but was waiting for administrative issues to be resolved before beginning construction. The Community complained about difficulties with local authorities in Rijeka and the

wider area of Istria regarding the allocation of space at city cemeteries for Muslim graves. The lack of proper burial spaces meant the deceased were often taken to Bosnia and Herzegovina for burial.

With respect to the restitution of private property, only persons who obtained citizenship by October 1996 may file claims under the law. With regard to the period covered by the law, government officials stated that a 1999 constitutional court decision has the effect of allowing claims relating to confiscations during the previously excluded period of World War II to be considered under the law's provisions. Noncitizens, including those who fled the country and lost their citizenship, are not allowed to file claims under the law and related regulations. Efforts to amend the law were not successful.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Violence and threats against religious persons, institutions, and symbols of all religious groups occurred sporadically. Religion and ethnicity are closely linked in society, and religion often was used historically to identify non-Croats and target them for discriminatory practices.

Human rights nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders noted that overall ethnic and religious relations remained stable, although members of the Jewish and Serb Orthodox communities believed the situation was worsening.

SPC officials from the Dalmatian Eparchy reported an increase in verbal abuse against Orthodox clergy, particularly in Sibenik, the seat of the eparchy. On April 18, 2009, unidentified persons smashed the glass in the front door and window of the Serb Cultural Society in Knin. On October 14, 2008, unknown perpetrators sprayed swastikas and Ustasha symbols on the gates of the eparchy seat in Sibenik. On September 28, 2008, a large group of unidentified persons disturbed residents of a neighborhood by singing and shouting abuse against Serbs and the SPC. The Orthodox bishop of Dalmatia complained that these incidents were not a

"guarantee of freedom of people and cultural institutions." Police investigated but made no arrests in any of the incidents. SPC officials noted that police in the area were inefficient and rarely reported their findings to the Church. Church officials also complained that local authorities were uncooperative and occasionally hostile towards the SPC.

In April 2009 the media reported that unknown persons broke into the Islamic space of worship in Split, where they wrote an insulting message and damaged an appliance. In October 2008, also in Split, windows were smashed in the Islamic Community building. Muslim religious leaders stated that the acts were isolated and described the overall position of their community in Split as favorable.

Acts of anti-Semitism were rare, but acts with anti-Semitic overtones occurred. On May 30, 2009, popular nationalist singer Marko "Thompson" Perkovic performed on Zagreb's main square, and a small group of audience members were seen giving Nazi salutes and displaying pro-Ustasha (an ultranational and fascist movement) symbols and singing Ustasha songs. Police arrested three persons for wearing Ustasha insignia and another three for violence. Unlike in the past, this concert was not cofunded by the City of Zagreb.

In April 2009 the CCJC reported that a Jewish cemetery in Vrbovic was destroyed; the date of the vandalism was not determined.

The CCJC reported that swastikas were painted on their building in Zagreb in March 2009. Police painted over the marks but made no arrests or further investigations.

On January 27, 2009, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a visit by school children to the premises of Bet Israel was interrupted by a bomb threat. Police investigated but made no arrests.

On January 30, 2009, local media reported that a list of the most prominent Jews in Croatia had been published on a right-wing ultranationalist website. Parts of the list were later republished in the media and on other websites. The list was meant to illustrate that Jews "were all around" in positions of influence and were found "wherever there is political power and money." The media said the list was evocative of Nazi-era "hit lists."

On January 26, 2009, local television station NOVA TV broadcast a news show on the conflict in the Gaza Strip. Guest commentator Vedrana Rudan compared the

situation in Gaza to that of the Holocaust. Rudan was criticized by Jewish leaders and by some members of the government and media, although others defended her right to free speech. NOVA TV issued an apology, temporarily suspended the editor of the news show, and stated that Rudan would not be a guest in future broadcasts. Rudan claimed that the only reason she was not invited to return was because the owner of NOVA TV was president of the World Jewish Congress. Jewish leaders complained that NOVA TV continued to show repeats of the same segment despite issuing an apology.

Both the CCJC and Bet Israel reported several letters, e-mails, and telephone calls mostly criticizing Israeli policy towards Palestinians but also containing elements of anti-Semitic hate speech. The CCJC also reported that a member of their community had found flyers in a local tram urging citizens to boycott Israeli companies in protest of "Israeli aggression."

On July 20, 2008, Dinko Sakic, the former commander of the World War II Ustasha-run concentration camp Jasenovac, died in a prison hospital while serving a 20-year sentence and reportedly was buried in his Ustasha uniform in Zagreb. The president of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff, wrote President Stipe Mesic in August 2008 to protest that the priest presiding over the burial praised Sakic as a model for all citizens. The President's Office responded that it "expected responsible institutions to take the necessary steps to prevent Dinko Sakic's funeral from damaging the country's reputation or inflicting long-term damaging effects on a disoriented young population." State prosecutors investigated the case but did not find sufficient evidence to press charges, since any display of the uniform had been in private.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. embassy officials encouraged the Government to respect religious freedom in practice. In addition, embassy officials met frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and minority groups to address human rights and religious freedom matters.

CUBA

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion.

The Government continued to exert control over all aspects of social life, including religious expression. The Government harassed some members of religious organizations that were not officially recognized. Although government harassment of religious organizations continued during the reporting period, reports of harassment declined slightly. Various religious groups reported fewer restrictions on politically sensitive expression, the ability to hold religious activities even for organizations without official recognition, increased capacity to conduct charitable and community service projects, fewer import and travel restrictions, permission to repair buildings, and significant increases in membership. The Government continued to maintain strict controls on the construction of new buildings for religious purposes, and permission was difficult to obtain. Religious groups complained about widespread surveillance and infiltration of their membership by state security agents.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government urged international pressure on the Government to promote religious freedom and other human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 68,888 square miles and a population of 11.4 million. There was no independent authoritative source on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership. The Roman Catholic Church estimates that 60 percent of the population is Catholic. Actual membership in Protestant churches is estimated at 5 percent and includes Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and Lutherans. Other groups include Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Some sources estimate that as much as 80 percent of the population consults with practitioners of religions with West African roots, such as the form of Santeria derived from ethnic Yorubas (Regla de Ocha) and the form of Santeria with origins in the Congo River basin (Regla de Palo), for assistance with specific immediate problems such as bearing children, curing illness, or ensuring safe passage.

The Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) is an officially sanctioned umbrella organization that works closely with the Government and includes 25 religious organizations as full members, eight associate members, two with observer status, and 10 interfaith movements. The CCC is structured into five "zones" across the island, and according to its leadership, represents approximately 100,000 Christians. Most CCC members are officially recognized by the State, although several, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church, lack legal status and are recognized through their membership in the CCC. Other officially recognized groups, including the Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the small Jewish and Muslim communities, do not belong to the CCC.

Catholic Church officials estimate that 10 percent of baptized Catholics regularly attend Mass. Membership in Protestant churches was estimated at 550,000 persons. The Baptists, represented in four different conventions, are possibly the largest Protestant denomination, followed closely by the Pentecostal churches, particularly the Assemblies of God. The number of Pentecostals is believed to be rising sharply. Jehovah's Witnesses reported more than 90,000 members, the Seventh-day Adventists 30,000, Anglicans 22,000, Methodists 21,000, Presbyterians 15,000, Quakers 300, and Mormons 50. The Mormons meet in Havana in space rented from another church. The Jewish community has 1,500 members, 1,200 of whom reside in Havana.

The Muslim population consists of 6,000 temporary residents, mainly businessmen, students, and diplomats, and 300 native-born Sunni Muslims. There are approximately 50 Shi'a Muslims. The Shi'a community directs the Al-Ma'sumin Islamic Center. In the fall of 2008 a hurricane extensively damaged the building, and the Center now operates out of an apartment. The Government is working with the Government of Iran to provide a replacement for the leader of the Shi'a community when the current leader, Miguel Aquila Cardenas "Hassan Felix," a native Cuban, travels to Iran to complete the studies necessary to obtain the title of Mufti.

Several embassies, led by the Iranian and Saudi Arabian missions, offered to build a mosque in Havana; however, the Government has not identified land for this

project nor officially accepted the offer. The Government and the Muslim community disagree on construction of the mosque; the Government intends to present a completed structure to the officially recognized groups, and the Muslim community would like Muslims to build it.

Foreign missionary groups operate through registered churches. Visits by religious figures are handled by the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion.

Changes to the constitution in 1992 declared the country to be a secular state, retained a provision for the separation of church and state, and eliminated references to scientific materialism and atheism.

The Government does not officially favor any particular religion or church. The Government's main interaction with religious groups is through the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. The Office's stated purpose is to encourage dialogue between religious groups and the Government, but many religious figures believe its real role is to assert the Government's power.

In 2008 the Government signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights with reservations. Article 18 of the ICCPR guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The Government has not ratified the treaties.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the provincial Registry of Associations within the Ministry of Justice to obtain official recognition. Registration procedures require groups to identify where they will conduct their activities, identify their funding for these activities, and obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad, receive foreign visitors, and meet in officially

recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request individual exit permits and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places. The Government has not registered The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but maintains a written agreement that allows members to hold weekly meetings and baptize new members.

The law allows for the construction of new houses of worship once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely authorizes the permits. A Russian Orthodox Church, completed in 2008 in the historic center of Havana, was the most recent church built. Several religious leaders noted that during the reporting period the Government more readily gave permission to repair or restore existing churches; however, the process of obtaining a permit for an expansion or repair project and purchasing construction materials from government outlets remained lengthy and expensive. During the reporting period construction continued on a Catholic seminary, and many churches were expanded or repaired.

House churches are subject to numerous regulations, many of which address location and hours of worship. Directive 43 and resolution 46 require house churches to register with the Government. The majority of house churches were unregistered and thus technically illegal; however, most registered religious groups were able to hold services in private homes. The Government officially registered 1,640 house churches, but the status of up to 3,000 remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

The Government observes December 25, commonly associated with Christmas Day, as a national holiday. Government declarations and calendars do not assign any religious significance to the day; it is simply designated a holiday.

Religious literature and other religious materials generally are imported through a registered religious group. The Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party supervises the importation of religious materials and literature and requires that religious groups submit activity reports.

Religious groups are required to submit a request to the local principal official of the Communist Party before being allowed to hold processions or other events outside of religious buildings.

Churches provide religious education classes to their members, as well as seminars to wider audiences. Some postgraduate courses in the history of religion are offered at the state-run University of Havana. The Government allows some

religious groups, such as the Catholic Church and the Havana Jewish community center, to administer some charities and offer religious education classes and adult education courses on subjects such as computers and foreign languages. The larger churches are increasingly involved in offering community service, such as assistance to the elderly and the suicide hotline operated by the First Presbyterian Church of Havana. International faith-based charitable operations, such as the Catholic charity Caritas and the Salvation Army, have offices but tend to keep a low profile. Some churches, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, expressed frustration that in the fall of 2008 it was not allowed to offer relief after a series of devastating hurricanes because the Government restricted the use of donations originating in the United States. However, other faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including several based in the United States, stated that the Government allowed them to import food and medicine and allowed their affiliated religious organizations to distribute the donations directly.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to exert control over all aspects of societal life including religious expression. The Ministry of the Interior continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, religious professionals, and laypersons. Government officials continued to harass, threaten, and fine unregistered religious groups; state security forces continued to subject officially sanctioned and unregistered house churches to surveillance. Several religious groups, including Pentecostals, viewed the regulations governing house churches as overly restrictive. Although no group reported an official denial of its application to the Office of Religious Affairs, many organizations reported that the Government did not reply to their requests nor answer their correspondence.

The Government does not permit religious education in public schools nor the operation of private primary and secondary schools of any kind, including religious schools, although several international schools in Havana are given considerable leeway in setting their curriculums.

The Government impedes access to printing by making equipment and supplies costly; nevertheless, the Catholic Church and some other churches published periodicals during the reporting period.

There were reports that prison authorities did not inform inmates of their right to religious assistance, delayed months before responding to such requests, and limited visits to a maximum of two or three times a year.

Officials of various groups reported that local officials discriminated against religious persons because of ignorance or personal prejudice. Religious persons encountered employment problems in certain professions, such as education.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In June 2009 in Camaguey, state security reportedly detained several evangelical pastors for holding an unauthorized meeting.

In April 2009 the state prosecutor recommended a seven-year prison sentence for Pastor Omar Gude Perez. Gude is a leader of the "Apostolic Reformation," an association of independent nondenominational churches. In May 2008 authorities originally imprisoned Gude and charged him with "human trafficking." In March 2009 a court dismissed the human trafficking charges, but Gude remained in prison, and in April 2009 state prosecutors charged him with illicit economic activity and falsification of documents. Gude maintained his innocence and stated he was being persecuted for his religious activities. After Gude's arrest, government officials conducted a full inventory of his house and threatened the family with eviction and confiscation of their belongings.

In October 2008 state security arrested Reverend Roberto Rodriguez Rodriguez and his two sons, charging them with threatening a neighbor. The family maintained that the charges were unfounded and that the basis for the charges was Rodriguez's withdrawal in September 2008 of his organization, the Interdenominational Fellowship of Evangelical Pastors and Ministers in Cuba (CIMPEC), from the CCC, citing state interference in religious matters. The government Registrar of Organizations stripped Rodriguez of his presidency of CIMPEC, which the registrar stated was unconstitutional. The Government sentenced Reverend Eric Gabriel Rodriguez de Toro, the son of Rodriguez, to house arrest for a period from three months to one year. Roberto Rodriguez remained in prison awaiting a court date, which after several postponements had not been set at the end of the reporting period.

In 2007 police entered the grounds of the Santa Teresita Catholic Church in Santiago de Cuba, beat several persons gathered for Mass who had participated in

a political protest earlier that day, and detained 18 persons. The Government apologized to the local bishop but not to the parish priest.

In April 2009 authorities threatened to evict evangelical minister Julio Ibanez of the city of Mariel in Havana Province, citing irregularities in the title to his property. Ibanez stated that the charges were false, and that the real motivation for the eviction was to stop the religious activities held in his house.

In 2007 police in Santiago de Cuba evicted Pentecostal preacher Alain Tolerano Valiante and his family from their home and demolished the church his congregation had erected without permission in a rural area. Police temporarily detained a member of the congregation who was taking photographs and confiscated his camera.

Although there were no reports of persons imprisoned or detained for specifically religious reasons, there were cases of prosecutions of religious workers for other crimes in which evidence suggests the Government targeted the individuals for their religious activities.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In general, the majority of religious groups saw a slight improvement in the ability to obtain religious material, receive donations from abroad, and receive exit permits for their members to attend regional and international conferences.

Officially and unofficially sanctioned religious groups, as well as practitioners of religions with origins in Africa, reported no problems conducting their services as long as they informed the police beforehand, and neighbors did not complain.

The leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists stated that mistreatment and job discrimination that were particularly harsh in the past were now confined to isolated cases. The leaders stated that their membership was usually offered the option of alternative civic service in lieu of mandatory military service, and that their members were usually exempted from patriotic activities at

school. The leaders of the Seventh-day Adventists stated that their members were usually excused from work or school activities on Saturdays. Both groups stated that discrimination and harassment decreased.

The Government permitted the Catholic Church to conduct Christmas and Easter Masses inside some prisons. On December 25, 2008, five Catholic bishops, including Cardinal Jaime Ortega, celebrated Christmas Mass in the large prison of Combinado del Este in Havana Province. This was the first time in 50 years that Christmas services were held in a prison.

Some religious groups reported fewer restrictions on politically sensitive expression; for example, some Catholic parishes offered prayers for political prisoners. While religious leaders normally avoided explicitly political commentary, congregations reported increasing boldness in discussions of social issues in sermons without encountering direct severe repercussions as in the past. Nevertheless, when in February 2009 Father José Conrado Rodríguez of the parish of Santa Teresita de Jesús in Santiago de Cuba published a strongly worded open letter to President Raúl Castro, not only condemning social problems in the country but also lamenting the lack of freedom, state security increased interrogations and threats directed at his parishioners, especially younger persons. The organization Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), composed of relatives and supporters of political prisoners, gathered without government interference on Sundays at the Church of Santa Rita de Casias in Havana.

Various religious groups found it somewhat easier to import religious materials; bring in foreign religious workers; travel abroad to attend conferences and religious events; use limited Internet access; and restore houses of worship. In March 2009 the Government gave permission for the renovation of four Catholic churches in Havana using funds from the Catholic international charitable organization Aid to the Church in Need. Outside Havana, construction continued on the first new Catholic seminary in 50 years, while instruction took place in classrooms in the seminary's current quarters in central Havana.

Many religious organizations reported a significant rise in membership as well as a revival in interest in religion, especially among the young. Most churches reported increased participation in religious instruction for children because government schools no longer scheduled competing activities on Saturdays or Sundays.

On November 29, 2008, the Catholic Church celebrated the first beatification in the country, which declared Friar José Olallo Valdés blessed. President Raúl Castro and other government officials attended the ceremony.

In 2008 the Catholic Church received 10 hours of television broadcast time, eight of which covered the November beatification ceremony. The Government granted the CCC time for periodic radio broadcasts early on Sunday mornings. In 2008 the Catholic Church received 19 hours of radio broadcast time.

All the Catholic dioceses except one held authorized processions for the celebration of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre. For the first time, the Government authorized a public procession in Santiago de Cuba in conjunction with this celebration.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, the growth of small unregistered Pentecostal and charismatic congregations created divisions among Protestant groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. government policy toward the country is to promote increased respect for human rights, including religious freedom, and to support the desire of its citizens to freely determine their country's future. The U.S. Government encourages the development of civil society, which includes strengthening religious institutions. Officials from the U.S. Interests Section met frequently with representatives of religious groups.

As in the past, the U.S. Government worked with its partners in the international community to press the Government to cease repressive practices, including religious discrimination, harassment, and surveillance.

CYPRUS

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 5,747 square miles and an estimated population in the government-controlled area of 789,000. Prior to 1974, the country experienced a long period of strife between its Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. In response, the UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) began peacekeeping operations in 1964. The island has been divided de facto since the Turkish military intervention of 1974, following a coup d'état directed from Greece. The southern part of the island is under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, while the northern part is administered by Turkish Cypriots. In 1983 their administration proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC"). The United States does not recognize the "TRNC," nor does any other country except Turkey. A buffer zone, or "green line," patrolled by UNFICYP, separates the two parts. In 2003 Turkish Cypriot authorities relaxed many restrictions on movement between the two communities, including abolishing all crossing fees. The new procedures led to relatively unimpeded contact between the communities and permitted Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to visit religious sites located in the other community; however, citizens, as well as foreigners, must show identification at the buffer zone crossing points to go from one side to the other.

According to the most recent (2001) population census, 95 percent of the permanent population in the government-controlled area belongs to the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus. Religious groups that

constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Roman Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Maronite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Jewish, and other groups.

There is a Buddhist temple in Nicosia. There is a synagogue in Larnaca. Both the Buddhist temple and the synagogue are used primarily by expatriates and foreign residents. The Jewish community, numbering approximately 2,000, includes a very small number of native Jewish Cypriots and a greater number of Israeli, English, and other European Jews who are part of the expatriate community, which includes both observant and nonpracticing members.

A 2006 opinion poll indicated that 19 percent of Greek Cypriots attended church services every Sunday, 23 percent attended once or twice a month, 35 percent attended only for major religious holidays and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, and 19 percent rarely attended. The remainder did not attend religious services.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution specifies that the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, which is not under the authority of the mainland Greek Orthodox Church, has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with its holy canons and charter. The Church of Cyprus is exempt from taxes with regard to religious activity and, according to the law, is required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activities. The Constitution also lays out guidelines for the Vakif, the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots, which similarly has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with its laws and principles. The Vakif, however, operated only in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots during the reporting period. No legislative, executive, or other act may contravene or interfere with the Orthodox Church or the Vakif.

Three other religious groups are recognized in the 1960 Constitution: Maronite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, and "Latins" (Roman Catholics). These groups are also exempt from taxes and are eligible, along with the Church of Cyprus and the Vakif, for government subsidies for their religious institutions.

The Government of Cyprus recognizes the following holy days as national holidays: Epiphany, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Spirit Day (Pentecost), Assumption, and Christmas.

There are constitutional and other legal bars against religious discrimination. The 1975 Vienna III Agreement remains the basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living in the government-controlled area. Among other things, this agreement provides for facilities for religious worship. Religious groups other than the five recognized religions are not required to register with the Government; however, if they desire to engage in financial transactions, such as maintaining a bank account, they must register as nonprofit organizations. To register, a group must submit an application through an attorney that states the purposes of the nonprofit organization and provides the names of the organization's corporate directors. Upon approval, nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt and are required to provide annual reports of their activities. Registration is granted promptly. The Ministry of Commerce reported that no religious groups were denied registration during the reporting period.

There are no prohibitions against missionary activity or proselytizing in the government-controlled area. Foreign missionaries must obtain and periodically renew residence permits to live in the country; normally renewal requests are approved.

The Government requires children in public primary and secondary schools to take instruction in the Greek Orthodox religion. Parents of other religions may request that their children be excused; these children are then exempted from attending religious services and instruction. This exemption is not allowed for children whose parents are Greek Cypriot, regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Since 2003, when restrictions on movement to the northern part of the island were relaxed, Greek Orthodox Cypriots as well as other religious groups have reported better access to religious sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriots enjoyed relatively easy access to religious sites in the government-controlled area; however, a Turkish Cypriot authority reported that Turkish Cypriot cemeteries and mosques in the villages of Kosi and Aplanda in the Larnaca district were inaccessible, as they were reportedly within Greek Cypriot military camps.

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) reported that it spent \$927,800 (€663,500) in 2008 for the conservation of 17 mosques and other Islamic places of worship in the government-controlled area. The 2009 MOI budget for the same activities was \$1,182,000 (€845,280). The Department of Antiquities spent an additional \$147,500 (€105,463) in 2008 on the conservation of the 17 mosques because they are also considered historical monuments. The Department's 2009 budget for this purpose was \$62,926 (€45,000) plus labor costs. Of the 17 mosques, only four were open to public use, despite increased need caused by an influx of Muslim asylum seekers and students. The single functioning mosque in Nicosia was particularly overcrowded.

Missionaries have the legal right to proselytize; it is illegal for a missionary to use "physical or moral compulsion" to make religious conversions. The police may investigate missionary activity based on a citizen's complaint. They may also open an investigation if missionaries are suspected of being involved in illegal activities that threaten the security of the republic, constitutional or public order, or public health and morals. In contrast with the previous report, there were no reports that the Government monitored missionary activity.

Conscientious objectors, including religious ones, are exempt from active military duty; however, they are legally required to complete an alternative military service and perform reservist duty in the Greek Cypriot National Guard. During the military swearing-in ceremony, Orthodox clergy lead a common prayer; while recruits may opt out of taking part in the prayer, minority religious groups reported that this option was rarely used as recruits did not want to bring negative attention on themselves.

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism (KISA) reported that the Buddhist community faced difficulty finding a permanent temple in Nicosia due to an inability to obtain necessary permits from local municipalities. In December 2008 police allegedly visited the site the community was using as a temple in response to complaints submitted by neighbors. The police allegedly warned that they would shut down the temple if operations continued without a permit. KISA submitted a complaint to the

Ombudsman's Office, which opened an investigation. In the meantime, the community used a meditation center in another neighborhood as a temple.

There were complaints received by the Ombudsman's Office and the NGOs Future Worlds Center and KISA that the Nicosia District Office of the Social Welfare Services Department refused Christmas and Easter bonuses to entitled welfare recipients. Future Worlds Center reported that only non-Christians were affected; however, KISA reported that bonuses were withheld from all foreign beneficiaries irrespective in Nicosia of their religions. The Ombudsman's Office reported that it received complaints that individual Social Welfare officers delivered bonuses inconsistently across the island; at the end of the reporting period, an investigation was ongoing as to whether religion and/or nationality could have influenced delivery of bonuses. Future Worlds Center also received complaints that the Office of Social Welfare Services discontinued welfare benefits to asylum seekers of Muslim origin who turned down jobs on pig farms based on religious objections.

At the end of the reporting period, the Ombudsman's Office was investigating complaints from non-Greek Orthodox prisoners in the Central Prison that they lacked facilities to exercise their religion. While the prison was equipped with an Orthodox Church place of worship, no similar facilities were available to non-Orthodox prisoners, who make up the majority of the prison population. Additionally, a Muslim within the "open prison" filed a complaint alleging that he was prevented from attending mosque on holy days.

Some religious denominations reported difficulties in obtaining visas from the Cypriot government for clergy and student volunteers from countries outside of the European Union.

The Baha'i community reported that it often faced difficulty burying its dead, as cemeteries generally exist only for recognized religious groups. It reported asking the Government for a plot to create a cemetery but claimed that it received no response by the end of the reporting period. The Jewish community reported that it did not receive a water source for its cemetery from the Larnaca Municipality and contended the municipality is required to provide one by law; the lack of water made it difficult for the community to perform traditional cleansing after burials.

Several religious groups reported difficulties in registering as nonprofit charities and alleged that the Government was unresponsive to status-of-application inquiries.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In May 2009 an Advisory Board for the Preservation, Physical Protection, and Restoration of the Immovable Cultural Heritage of Cyprus was formed by the members of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage within the framework of the ongoing negotiations between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. The board was in the process of compiling a priority list of immovable cultural heritage sites that needed urgent restoration. The board decided to start the restoration of two pilot projects: the Arnavut Mosque and the Archangel Michael Church.

From November 16 to 18, 2008, the Church of Cyprus and the Roman Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio hosted the 22nd International Meeting of Prayer for Peace. Heads of states, including President Demetris Christofias, and several hundred religious leaders representing Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Jainism, Sikhism, Tenrikyo, Parseeism, and Shintoism attended the event, which was aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue.

From September 29 to October 2, 2008, the Church of Cyprus hosted the Executive Committee meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches, which brought together the heads of several Christian denominations of the Middle East.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Relations between the Church of Cyprus and other religious communities in the government-controlled area were cordial.

In May 2009 Future Worlds Center reported complaints of Muslim construction workers not being allowed to stop work for prayers.

The Jewish community in Larnaca reported an increase in anti-Semitic incidents following the start of Israel's Gaza offensive in late December 2008. The Chabad House in Larnaca reported instances of rock and egg throwing that continued throughout the reporting period, as well as harassing telephone calls. Although these incidents were reported to police, protection was not increased to a level that community leaders found sufficient; this discouraged some community members from taking part in events.

In May 2008 two men vandalized one of the two mosques in Limassol. Press reports indicated the men were retaliating in response to an attack by a group of men of Arab origin. Police closed the investigation without locating any suspects.

Some religious groups reported that students occasionally suffered negative reactions from teachers and fellow students when taking advantage of the exemption from religious instruction.

Several religious groups complained of difficulties buying land or constructing buildings, forcing them to rent, instead of owning, the properties where they meet.

Although Turkish Cypriots occasionally reported that unused mosques in the government-controlled area were vandalized, the Government of Cyprus routinely maintained and repaired them.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

AREA ADMINISTERED BY TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Since 1974 the northern part of Cyprus has been administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities. It proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") in 1983. The United States does not recognize the "TRNC," nor does any other country except Turkey.

The "basic law" in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots provides for freedom of religion, and other "laws" and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The "law" refers specifically to a "secular republic"; however, the

politically divisive environment of Cyprus engendered some restrictions on religious freedom, particularly for Greek Cypriots, Armenians, and Maronites.

The Turkish Cypriot authorities generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with Turkish Cypriot authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to a count in April 2006, the population in the area was estimated at 265,100. Ninety-eight percent of this population is Sunni Muslim, at least nominally. An estimated 10,000, mostly immigrant workers from Turkey of Turkish, Kurdish, or Arab origin, are Alevis, "followers of Ali," who follow a strand of Shi'a Islam with some pre-Islamic influences. There are also followers of other schools of Islam. There is a Turkish Cypriot Baha'i community of approximately 500 persons. Most non-Muslims residing in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots are foreigners from Western Europe who are generally members of the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches. Approximately 10 percent of the population in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots attends religious services regularly.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The "TRNC constitution" provides for freedom of religion, and other "laws" and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The "law" at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by "governmental" or private actors.

The "law" does not recognize any specific religion. However, it states that the Vakif, the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots, has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with Vakif laws and principles. The Vakif is tax-exempt in its

religious activities, but its commercial operations are subject to applicable taxes. It also receives subsidies. No other religious organization is tax-exempt or receives subsidies. The Vakif is the largest landowner in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriot authorities bar religious discrimination. The 1975 Vienna III Agreement is the basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living in the government-controlled area. Among other things the agreement provides for facilities for religious worship, stating that "the Greek Cypriots at present in the north of the island are free to stay and they will be given every help to lead a normal life, including facilities for education and for the practice of their religion, as well as medical care by their own doctors and freedom of movement in the north."

The following holy days are observed widely in the Turkish Cypriot community: Kurban Bairam, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Ramadan Bairam.

Religious organizations are not required to register with authorities unless they wish to engage in commercial activity or apply for tax-exempt status. There are no "legal" restrictions on missionary activity; however, such activity was rare.

There is instruction in religion, ethics, and comparative religions in two grades of the primary school system; however, it is not compulsory. There is no formal Islamic religious instruction in public schools, and there are no "state-supported" religious schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The authorities generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the authorities during the reporting period.

Greek Cypriot Orthodox and Maronite Catholics were prohibited from visiting religious sites located in military zones in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, since it is "illegal" for civilians to enter military zones. They were allowed to celebrate Mass on a regular basis, without prior permission, at seven sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots that had been designated by the Turkish Cypriot authorities; prior permission was required to celebrate Mass at the other estimated 500 religious sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Some religious groups complained that authorities often took several months to respond to special requests, often not giving a positive answer until only several days before the requested date for a ceremony; this interfered with the ability of those coming from abroad to participate. The Jewish community complained that a cemetery was inaccessible, due to its location in a military zone.

One religious group reported that a senior clergy figure living outside Cyprus was refused entry to the "TRNC" to take part in a pilgrimage during the reporting period.

Religious groups complained that some religious sites, many of which they had little or no access to, were in disrepair and close to collapse. Turkish Cypriot authorities reported having completed the restoration since 2006 of 12 Orthodox churches in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. The U.S. Government, through a program implemented by the U.N. Development Programme and with the approval of Turkish Cypriot authorities, continued to support a stabilization and restoration project at the Maronite Prophet Elias Monastery to prevent further deterioration.

Several Greek Cypriot Orthodox and Maronite churches have been turned into museums; one religious group complained that certain religious items were being held in these museums against the wishes of the community.

While Turkish Cypriot authorities funded the construction of a number of mosques, construction of facilities for non-Sunni Muslims was not funded despite some groups lacking facilities; on occasion this inhibited religious groups' ability to practice their faith. Alevis reported that they were unable to build a facility due to lack of funding. Alevis also reported that due to "regulations," they were required to conduct funerals inside mosques, contrary to their traditions.

In June 2009 a Turkish-speaking Protestant congregation complained of mistreatment at the hands of Turkish Cypriot authorities and some members of the public, allegedly over fears that members were proselytizing. They also complained that they were unable to register as an "association" and thus could not establish a trust fund, construct a place of worship, or establish a cemetery for congregants.

Some religious groups reported monitoring by Turkish Cypriot "police" during religious and community events.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Greek Cypriots continued to report that vandals damaged vacant Greek Orthodox churches and removed religious icons in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots; there were no reported "law enforcement" investigations of these incidents. According to Turkish Cypriot leaders, in response to complaints of vandalism, some locations were fenced for their protection.

In September 2008 the Cyprus Turkish Teachers Union criticized the "government" for not preventing a group of approximately 400 students, funded by the Turkish "Embassy," from going to Turkey for religious instruction during the summer holidays.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with Turkish Cypriot authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Occasional acts and expressions of anti-Semitism were reported among some elements of the population.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 30,442 square miles and a population of 10.2 million. The population is largely homogeneous with a dominant Christian tradition. However, in part as a result of 40 years of communist rule between 1948 and 1989, the majority of citizens do not identify themselves as members of any organized religion. In a 2008 opinion poll sponsored by the Stredisko Empiricky Vyzkumu (STEM) agency, 34 percent of respondents claimed to believe in God, while 39 percent identified themselves as atheists. Only 25 percent of citizens under the age of 29 professed a belief in God. Similarly, in a 2007 poll by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum pro vyzkum verejneho mineni, or CVVM), 55 percent of citizens voiced a mistrust of churches, while only 28 percent stated that they trust them. There was a revival of interest in religion after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution;" however, the number of those professing religious beliefs or participating in organized religion has fallen steadily since then in every region of the country.

Thirty-three percent of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, 3 percent to Protestant churches, 1 percent to the Czech Hussite Church, and 2 percent to other religious groups. Five percent of the population attends Catholic services regularly, and most live in the southern Moravian dioceses of Olomouc and Brno. One percent of the population are practicing Protestants. In 2004 Islam was registered as an officially recognized religion, and leaders of the local Muslim

community estimate that there are several thousand Muslims in the country. There are two mosques, located in Brno and Prague, but prayer rooms are scattered throughout the country. The vast majority of the historic Jewish community, which numbered approximately 100,000 before the Nazi occupation of the area of today's Czech Republic, was killed during the Holocaust. There are approximately 3,000 persons officially registered as members of the Jewish community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels sought to protect this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious affairs are the responsibility of the Department of Churches in the Ministry of Culture. All religious groups registered with the Ministry of Culture are eligible to receive tax benefits and government subsidies, although some decline to receive state financial support as a matter of principle and an expression of their independence.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (December 26).

The 2002 Law on Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations created a two-tiered system of registration for religious organizations. To register at the first (lower) tier, a religious group must have at least 300 adult members permanently residing in the country. First-tier registration confers limited tax benefits; in addition, it imposes annual reporting requirements as well as a 10-year waiting period before an organization may apply for full second-tier registration. To register at the second tier, which entitles an organization to a share of state funding, a religious group must have membership, with the requisite signatures, equal to at least 0.1 percent of the country's population. Many smaller and less established religions were unable to obtain the signatures necessary for second-tier registration.

There are 30 state-recognized religious organizations. Two evangelical groups applied for registration during the reporting period--the Word of Life Church in March 2009 and the New Hope Church in October 2008. Both applications were

being considered at the end of the reporting period. Judaism is an officially registered religion because of its recognition by the state before 1989.

Only clergy of registered second-tier organizations may perform officially recognized marriage ceremonies and serve as chaplains in the military and prisons, although prisoners of other religious groups may receive visits from their respective clergy. Religious groups registered prior to 1991, such as the small Jewish community, are not required to meet these conditions for registration. Unregistered religious groups may not legally own community property, but they often form civic-interest associations for the purpose of managing their property until they are able to meet the qualifications for registration. The Government does not interfere with or prevent this type of interim solution. Unregistered religious groups otherwise are free to assemble and worship in the manner of their choice.

Religious organizations receive approximately \$70 million (CZK 14 billion) annually from the Government. Funds are divided proportionally among the 17 religious organizations that have second-tier registration and have elected to receive state assistance based on the number of clergy in each. Of this sum, approximately \$60 million (CZK 1.2 billion) is used to pay salaries to clergy members. The rest of the funding goes to church administration and maintenance of church property.

The Penal Code outlaws Holocaust denial and provides for prison sentences of six months to three years for public denial, questioning, approval of, or attempts to justify the Nazi genocide. The law also outlaws the incitement of hatred based on religion and provides for prison sentences of up to three years. A 2004 law designates January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day in the country.

Missionaries must obtain a long-term residence and work permit if they intend to remain longer than 90 days. There is no special visa category for religious workers; foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the stringent conditions for a standard work permit even if their activity is strictly ecclesiastical or voluntary in nature.

Of the 30 registered churches, 10 have obtained permission from the Ministry of Culture (under the 2002 religious freedom law) to teach religion in state schools. According to the Ministry, although religious instruction is optional in public schools, school directors must introduce religious education choices if there are at

least seven students in one class of the same religious group who request such instruction.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The legal dispute between the state and the Catholic Church over the St. Vitus Cathedral continued during the reporting period. In March 2009 the Supreme Court rejected the appeal by the Catholic Church against the 2008 ruling of the Prague City High Court that the Cathedral belonged to the state. In May 2009 the Catholic Church appealed the decision to the Constitutional Court; no decision had been made by the end of the reporting period.

The Government continued its effort to resolve religious communal property restitution problems. Jewish claims dated to the period of the Nazi occupation during World War II, while Catholic authorities pressed claims for properties that were seized under the former communist regime. In April 2008 the Government unanimously approved a bill on church restitution, allowing for the return of properties to religious orders and financial compensation for properties that belonged to churches, and sent it to Parliament. The bill was intended to resolve the issue of church restitution as well as financing of churches. The bill faced opposition from the Communists and Social Democrats, as well as from some coalition members in the Chamber of Deputies. In May 2008 the attempt to pass the bill on the first reading failed. In June 2008 a parliamentary commission was established to review the proposed bill. In April 2009 the commission recommended that the Chamber of Deputies reject the bill. At the end of the reporting period, the Chamber had not voted on the bill.

Since 1989 the Government has, by decree, returned most of the state-owned properties claimed by the Federation of Jewish Communities; the city of Prague and many other communities took a similar approach. A lawsuit pending in Brno at the end of the reporting period concerned properties in the possession of the Ministry of Interior. In 1994 the Federation of Jewish Communities identified 202 communal properties as its highest priorities for restitution, although it had more than 1,000 potential property claims. Of these 202 cases, 80 had been resolved, and the Jewish community tacitly agreed to forego claims on the remaining estimated 800 properties.

In 2000 Parliament enacted a law enabling the Government to return more than 60 works of art in the National Gallery to the Jewish community and an estimated 7,000 works of art in the Government's possession to individual Jewish citizens and their heirs. Of the artwork belonging to the religious community, all but two items were returned. Of the 7,000 works belonging to individuals, fewer than 1,000 had been returned by the end of the reporting period. The primary obstacle to resolving these claims was practical (tracing ownership or cases in which no heir survives). In 2006 the Government extended the law indefinitely, allowing individuals at any time to file claims for art in the state's possession.

The Foundation for Holocaust Victims continued to assist in the preservation of communal property, educational programs, and community welfare. From these assets, the state supported numerous social welfare projects. In 2007, for example, the state Foundation contributed \$300,000 (CZK 6 million) to institutions providing healthcare for approximately 500 Holocaust survivors. (Note: Since applications were first accepted in 2001, the number of survivors has dropped from approximately 2,500 to just over 500.)

The Ministry of Culture sponsors religiously oriented cultural activities through a grant program. In 2008 the Ministry provided \$210,000 (CZK 4.2 million). The Ministry sponsored some interfaith activities during the reporting period, including the ecumenical gathering Prayer for Home on Rip Hill.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice reflecting residual anti-Semitism. However, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

A small but persistent and fairly well-organized extreme right movement with anti-Semitic views existed within the country. Anti-Semitism also persisted among

other elements of the population, including neo-Nazi groups and Islamic extremists. In general, public expressions of anti-Semitic sentiment were rare, and authorities vigorously pursued Holocaust-denial investigations and prosecutions.

There were no reported violent anti-Semitic incidents against individuals in the country during the reporting period; however, there were isolated reports of property damage, other vandalism, and hate speech.

In January 2009 vandals damaged the Monument to Holocaust Victims in Teplice. Police were investigating the case at the end of the reporting period.

Several racially motivated marches occurred, organized mostly by the extreme right-wing Workers' Party. In March 2009, 200 neo-Nazis marched through Pilsen shouting anti-Semitic slogans. Police investigated one participant for propagating Nazism. In November 2008 extremists clashed with police in Janov.

The activities of groups such as National Resistance (Narodni odpor) and Autonomous Nationalists (Autonomi nacionaliste) were characterized by racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim attitudes as well as Holocaust denial and the dissemination of Nazi propaganda.

In April 2009 members of the National Resistance (associated with the right-wing extremist Workers' Party) invited former U.S. Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke to speak at Charles University, the most prestigious university in the country. When they learned of the event, Jewish groups successfully urged university officials to cancel Duke's speech. Duke's local sponsors reorganized the event at a Prague restaurant they disclosed on short notice to a select audience. The police raided the establishment and detained Duke. Using the Penal Code, the Government charged Duke with Holocaust denial and ordered his immediate departure.

A loose network operated between neo-Nazis not in prison and neo-Nazi prisoners sentenced for racially motivated crimes. Those outside sent presents and letters to the prisoners. The network of supporters, which called itself Prisoners of War (P.O.W.), included a women's group, Resistance Women Unity.

Extremist expressions were rare in political discourse. However, two small fringe parties (the National Party and the Workers' Party), neither of which had representation in Parliament, issued extremist statements.

There were reports of several neo-Nazi concerts. The Ministry of Interior continued its efforts to counter the neo-Nazis, which included monitoring of their activities, close cooperation with police units in neighboring countries, and concentrated efforts to shut down unauthorized concerts and gatherings of neo-Nazi groups. The police intervened in several incidents where hate speech was used. However, at times the police and other authorities ignored neo-Nazi actions. Sometimes police appeared to offer protection to neo-Nazis from anarchist demonstrators.

In May 2009 the Government approved a strategy to fight extremism. The strategy prepared by the Ministry of Interior stressed the importance of preventive measures, especially education.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. government efforts on religious issues focused largely on encouraging the Government and religious groups to resolve religious property restitution claims and registration of religious organizations.

During the reporting period, U.S. government and embassy officials emphasized to the Government and religious groups the importance of restitution (or fair and adequate compensation when return is no longer possible) in pending cases regarding property wrongfully taken from Holocaust victims, the Jewish community, and churches.

The Embassy maintained close contact with the Office of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, representatives of various religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations. Embassy officials met on several occasions with representatives of the Ministry of Culture to discuss the law on religious registration, as well as with representatives of smaller religious groups affected by the law, including the local Muslim community. Embassy and U.S. State Department officials worked with the Deputy Prime Minister and officials from his office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a follow-up conference on Holocaust-era assets that took place on June 26-30, 2009. As a result of the conference, the newly created Terezin Institute is expected to keep track of what governments are doing on Holocaust issues. Embassy representatives participated in several meetings with representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Catholic Church, and the Federation of Jewish Communities on restitution matters.

Embassy officials also responded to individual requests for assistance from Czech-American Holocaust victims seeking compensation.

DENMARK

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church and enjoys some privileges not available to other religious groups.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, such as occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, harassment, and vandalism, reflecting tensions between young Muslims and other young Danes.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy promotes religious dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community. The Embassy sponsored Muslim leaders and young persons to participate in activities that promote diversity, multiculturalism, integration, and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities as one foundation of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 16,639 square miles and a population of 5.4 million. Based on official statistics from January 2009, 82 percent of the population belongs to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). Although only 3 percent of church members attend services regularly, most members utilize the church for baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and religious holidays.

As a result of immigration trends, the second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting 3.7 percent of the population (210,000). Muslim communities tend to concentrate in public housing in the largest cities, particularly in Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include Catholics (37,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (14,500), Jews (7,000), Serbian Orthodox Christians (7,000), Baptists (5,100), Pentecostals (5,100), Buddhists (4,400), and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4,500). There are also many communities with fewer than 3,000

members, including Seventh-day Adventists, the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, Methodists, Anglicans, and Russian Orthodox. The German minority in southern Jutland and other nonethnic-Danish communities (particularly Scandinavian groups) have their own religious groups.

Official attendance figures indicate a shift from the Evangelical Lutheran Church to other denominations, with ELC membership falling from more than 90 percent of the population in the 1980s to a record-low level of 82 percent in 2009. A March 2009 Gallup Poll, however, indicated an increase in church attendance among young people and the elderly--but with a continued drop among middle-aged members.

The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology is located in Copenhagen, although it did not officially apply to the Government for recognition as a religious group during the reporting period.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church, the reigning monarch shall be a member of the Church, and the state shall support it. The ELC is the only religious organization that can receive state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. Approximately 12 percent of the Church's revenue comes from state subsidies; most of the rest comes from the church tax that is paid only by members. No individual is compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. However, members of other religious groups, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. A November 2007 ruling by the Supreme Court denied a request by nonmembers of the ELC for reimbursement of subsidies to the Church from general tax payments. The Supreme Court held that indirect financing of the ELC does not constitute religious discrimination because the Church also engages in nonreligious activities such as civil registration and management of nonsectarian cemeteries. The ruling also upheld the Church's official role in registering births and deaths. Allowing other

religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the ELC would require changes to the Constitution.

The Criminal Code prohibits public mockery of or insult to the doctrine or worship of a legally recognized religion. The maximum penalty for a violation of this provision is a fine and up to four months in prison. Since 1938 the Government has not prosecuted any case under the blasphemy provision; prosecutors have dismissed accusations of blasphemy as protected free speech.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and the day after Christmas.

The country mandates compulsory military service but provides a conscientious objection exemption. In lieu of military service, conscientious objectors may be required to serve in a civilian capacity.

On May 29, 2009, Parliament voted to amend the Administration of Justice Act to ban religious or political symbols, such as headscarves, turbans, Jewish skull caps, and crucifixes, from judicial attire, effective July 1, 2009.

Aside from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Government grants official status to other religious groups. Prior to 1970, a total of 11 religious communities received approval in the form of recognition by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities. Since then, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has approved more than 100 religious communities and churches under the Marriage Act, including several Muslim groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and followers of the indigenous Norse belief system Forn Sidr. These officially approved religious groups enjoy certain special rights, including the right to perform marriage ceremonies with legal effect, residence permits for foreign preachers, the right to establish cemeteries, and certain tax exemptions. Only ministers of religious groups approved under the Marriage Act may name and baptize children with legal effect, keep church registers, and transcribe certificates on the basis of such registers. In November 2007 the Justice Ministry assumed responsibility for administering the Marriage Act and the recognition of religious communities.

Religious communities not recognized by either royal decree or the Marriage Act are entitled to practice their faith without any licensing requirement, but their marriage ceremonies are not recognized by the state. Unrecognized religious communities, of which there were more than one hundred at the end of the reporting period, are not granted tax-exempt status.

The 2002 Guidelines for Approval of Religious Organizations require religious groups to submit the following items: a written text of the group's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, a copy of its rules, regulations, and organizational structure, an audited financial statement, and information about the group's leadership and each member with a permanent address in the country. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order."

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work as long as practitioners obey the law and do not act inconsistently with public morality or order.

All schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. The Evangelical Lutheran faith is taught in public schools; however, a student may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Additionally, the law requires that a "Christian studies" course covering world religions and philosophy and promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs be taught in public school. The course is compulsory, although students may be exempted from the course if a parent presents a request in writing. If the student is 15 years old or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption from the course. According to the Ministry of Education, less than 2 percent of students in the greater Copenhagen area, the area with the highest concentration of non-Christians, "opt out" of the Christian studies course. Section 76 of the Constitution protects the right of parents to educate their children in private schools or home schools.

On February 20, 2009, the Education Minister clarified in answer to a question by the Social Democrat's education spokesperson that Muslim, Jewish, and Christian prayers may be substituted for collective prayer in such venues as school assemblies, as long as the prayer is invoked without preaching.

During the period covered by the report, the Government continued to expand efforts to promote social and economic integration of refugees and immigrants.

These efforts received additional attention following the 2006 Muhammad cartoon crisis and republication of the cartoons in February 2008.

In 2007 the Government passed legislation that would require all foreign religious workers to pass a Danish language test within six months of entering the country or risk losing their residency permits, although it had not yet been determined when that requirement would be implemented. Critics claimed that the measure violates the European Convention on Human Rights and is aimed at restricting the entry of Muslim clerics, whose number is already restricted under a 2004 "Imam Law" that requires that the number of religious residence visas be reasonably proportioned to the size of the corresponding religious community. Additionally, the visa applicant must prove association with a recognized or approved religious community and possess a relevant background or education as a religious preacher, missionary, or member of a religious community.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although government policy contributed to the free practice of religion for most religious groups, the Government restricts the issuance of religious worker visas (see Legal/Policy Framework section). That restriction disproportionately affects groups that depend on missionaries from abroad, such as Muslims.

The Church of Scientology did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the reporting period. Scientologists are free to meet and practice. The Church of Scientology's application for legal recognition was turned down three times, and it claimed it was unable to obtain clarification of the requirements without submitting the registration application for a fourth time. Despite its unofficial status, the Church of Scientology maintained its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In October 2008 the Government hosted the Rabat follow-up Conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which was seen as a constructive step to promote better relations between the European Union and the states of the OIC in the aftermath of the republishing of the Danish Muhammad cartoons in January 2008.

Additionally, the Government allocated money in the November budget for a fall 2009 international conference on freedom of speech and anti-radicalization.

As of April 2009, the Brøndby cemetery was serving the Muslim community's needs with 215 persons buried. The cemetery opened in 2006 after a 15-year effort by members of the Muslim community. Plans for additional Islamic cemeteries in Odense and Herning were underway.

During the reporting period, plans progressed for the construction of a grand mosque and cultural center in Aarhus, the country's second largest city.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, such as occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, harassment, and vandalism, reflecting tensions between increasing numbers of young Muslims and other young Danes. The country, nevertheless, has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment.

Both members of the Jewish community and police sources attested to occasional friction between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Anti-Semitic incidents, such as hate speech occurring at pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian rallies in Copenhagen protesting the violence in Gaza, increased in January 2009 but decreased in February. In January a 29-year old man of Palestinian origin shot and injured two Israelis. Police indicated that the motive was a desire to protest the violence in Gaza. Most anti-Semitic acts involved vandalism, graffiti, or verbal insults.

At the end of the reporting period, cartoonist Kurt Westergaard continued to receive security protection. On February 13, 2008, all 17 major newspapers republished Westergaard's caricatures of the Islamic prophet Mohammad that first appeared in 2006. The newspapers sought to protest a foiled plot by three Muslims to kill the cartoonist. Some Muslims saw the republication as offensive and

provocative. The head of the largest Muslim association in the country, however, condemned the assassination plot. Press reports suggested that the majority of citizens saw the issue as one of freedom of speech being more important than objections by members of a particular religious community. The republication was followed by youth riots in immigrant neighborhoods and demonstrations and embassy closings in several other Muslim-majority countries.

Unemployment figures, crime rates (especially among young adults), and school dropout rates tended to be significantly higher among minority groups and were sometimes alleged to be indicative of discrimination on the basis of religion. It was difficult, however, to separate religious differences from differences in language and ethnicity, and the latter may be equally important in explaining unequal outcomes in access to well-paying jobs and social advancement. The integration of immigrant groups from Islamic countries was an important political and social topic of discussion.

There were isolated incidents of anti-immigrant sentiment, including graffiti, low-level assaults, denial of service, and employment discrimination on racial grounds. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was difficult to distinguish from discrimination against ethnic minorities. The Government criticized the incidents and investigated several, but it brought few cases to trial specifically on charges of racial discrimination or hate crimes. Reports continued of incidents of desecration of ethnic and religious minority gravesites.

In January 2009 the press reported that hospital workers in Odense unsuccessfully attempted to prevent Muslim women from wearing headscarves while on the job. The hospital's uniform policy committee indicated that hygiene was its primary focus, not religious symbols.

A poll by Statistics Denmark released in March 2009 indicated that 91 percent of those born outside the country thought their lives were better overall than they would have been in the lands of their births, except for the area of religious freedom, where 40 percent thought their lives would have been better in their countries of origin.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to operate in the country despite periodic calls by several political parties to ban the group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy regularly engages in dialogue with religious leaders and groups from the country's diverse religious community. Embassy officers engaged in an active Muslim outreach program, which included numerous meetings with religious and community leaders of leading Islamic organizations. Embassy officers had wide-ranging discussions with Muslim leaders on topics including religious and cultural diversity, democracy and civil liberties, the importance of interfaith dialogue and its role in supporting religious freedom, and Muslim life in the United States. The U.S. Government sponsored Muslim leaders identified by the Embassy to participate in International Visitor Leadership Programs focusing on diversity and multiculturalism, and which included introducing American Muslims to Muslims in the country. The Embassy continued sports and summer internship programs targeting young persons in religious and ethnic minority communities and worked with local nongovernmental organizations to support arts and educational exchange programs for minority youths in programs aimed at promoting integration and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities.

DJIBOUTI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were occasional reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Familial and societal customs discouraged proselytizing and conversion from Islam.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 8,450 square miles and a population of 660,000. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There are a small number of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Copts, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, and Baha'is. Foreign-born Djiboutians, as well as many expatriate residents, are often members of these denominations. Citizens are officially considered Muslims if they do not specifically identify with another faith.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Although Islam is the state religion, the Government imposes no sanctions on those who choose to ignore Islamic teachings or to practice other faiths.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has authority in all Islamic matters, including mosques, private religious schools (with the Ministry of Education), religious

events, as well as general Islamic guidelines of the state. The High Islamic Council within the Ministry is mandated to give advice on all religious concerns. It also is responsible for coordinating all Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the country.

The president and other government employees, including magistrates, are required to take religious oaths. While there is no penalty established by law for noncompliance, it remains an official custom. A small number of non-Muslims hold civil service positions without impediment.

For matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, Muslims are directed to Family Courts whose code includes elements of civil and Shari'a law. Civil courts address the same matters for non-Muslims.

Civil marriage is permitted only for non-Muslim foreigners. Muslims are required to marry in a religious ceremony. A non-Muslim man may marry a Muslim woman only after converting to Islam. According to article 23 of the Family Code, "impediment to a marriage occurs when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim."

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and the Islamic New Year.

The Government requires that a religious group register by submitting an application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, along with the Ministry of the Interior, investigates the group. Once approved, the group signs an initial two-year bilateral agreement detailing the scope of the group's activities.

Foreign clergy and missionaries perform charitable works and sell religious books. Foreign missionary groups are licensed by the Government to operate schools. Public schools do not teach religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were occasional reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Societal norms and customs discouraged proselytizing by non-Muslims and conversion from Islam; non-Muslim religious groups generally did not engage in public proselytizing.

The relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some representatives of Christian denominations noted occasional incidents of societal animosity towards non-Muslims. As in previous years, there were isolated reports of school children throwing rocks at churches.

However, French Roman Catholics and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have been part of society for almost a century and are an example of the considerable familiarity with, and tolerance of, other faiths by the Muslim majority.

Ethnic Somalis who were Christians were sometimes buried according to Islamic traditions by relatives who did not recognize their non-Muslim faith.

Several different Christian denominations maintained close informal ties to each other. The Minister of Islamic Affairs met with the heads of other religious groups occasionally and at government-organized ceremonies.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives periodically met with leaders and members of religious communities and with U.S. NGOs with a faith-based component to discuss common interests and promote respect for religious diversity. The Embassy focused several of its English language discussion groups on religious freedom and pluralism. The Ambassador used

representational events to promote discussions on religious tolerance and pluralism.

DOMINICA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 291 square miles and a population of 70,000. According to the 2001 population and housing census, approximately 61 percent of the population is Roman Catholic; Seventh-day Adventists and Pentecostals represent 6 percent each, and Baptists and Methodists 4 percent each. Anglicans, members of the Baha'i Faith, Christian Brethren, Church of Christ members, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Nazarenes, and Rastafarians are also present. Six percent of the population claims no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship; however, the Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian churches.

The Government observes Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government requires all religious organizations to register as nonprofit organizations with the Attorney General's Office; they also must register their buildings through the government registrar. Such recognition affects a religious group's nonprofit organization status, its ability to hold public meetings, and the work status of its missionaries. Any organization denied permission to register has the right to apply for judicial review.

The public school curriculum includes Christian education, and students are led in prayer during morning assembly. Non-Christian students are not required to participate. There are Catholic, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist schools; the Government subsidizes teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although intolerance is gradually decreasing, Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools. There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, has an area of 18,815 square miles and a population of 9.7 million. The largest religious group is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christian groups (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to a 2006 population survey by the Gallup Organization, the population is 39.8 percent Catholic (practicing), 29.1 percent Catholic (nonpracticing), and 18.2 percent evangelical Protestant. In the same study, 10.6 percent stated they had no religion. The Dominican Confederation of Evangelical Unity claims evangelicals represent 16 to 20 percent of the population.

There are approximately 300 Jews. Most live in Santo Domingo, which has a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. There is a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua. Both synagogues are led by the same individual. Government sources estimate there are between 5,000 and 10,000 Muslims, a figure that includes many foreign students. A Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo has approximately 500 regular worshippers. There is a small number of Buddhists and Hindus. Some Catholics practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería), witchcraft (brujería), or voodoo (vodou), but because these practices are usually concealed, the number of adherents is unknown.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

While the Constitution specifies that there is no state church and provides for freedom of religion and belief, the Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, which designates Catholicism as the official religion and extends special privileges to the Catholic Church not granted to other religious groups. These include the legal recognition of church law, use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and a complete exoneration from customs duties. In 2008, the Government informed the Catholic Church that it would assume most of the cost of building a new cathedral and religious sanctuary complex in Bayaguana, but after obtaining the site, placed construction on hold due to lack of funds.

The Government observes Epiphany, Our Lady of Altagracia Day, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of Mercedes Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exoneration from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for customs exoneration were denied during the reporting period. Evangelical Protestant leaders regularly urged the Government to provide their churches with privileges equivalent to those granted to the Catholic Church and proposed a law to that effect; at the end of the reporting period the law was pending. Catholic weddings are the only religious wedding ceremonies that the Government recognizes.

In October 2008, the Supreme Court denied the constitutional challenge brought in 2006 by the Ministerio Jesús es Sanidad y Vida Eterna (Jesus is Health and Life Eternal Ministry), an evangelical Christian organization, of the concordat between the state and the Vatican. The Supreme Court ruled the concordat did not bar other religious groups from receiving the same benefits granted to the Catholic Church under the concordat.

The law requires the Bible be read in public schools, but it was not enforced. Private schools are exempt from this requirement.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority groups.

NORTH KOREA

The Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief." However, in practice the Government severely restricted religious activity, except that which was supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. Genuine religious freedom does not exist.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, and government policy continued to interfere with the individual's ability to choose and to manifest his or her religious belief. The regime continued to repress the religious activities of unauthorized religious groups. Recent refugee, defector, missionary, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports indicate that religious persons engaging in proselytizing in the country, those who have ties to overseas evangelical Christian groups operating across the border in the People's Republic of China, and specifically those repatriated from China and found to have been in contact with foreigners or missionaries have been arrested and subjected to harsh penalties. Refugees and defectors continued to allege that they witnessed the arrests and execution of members of underground Christian churches by the regime in prior years. Due to the country's inaccessibility and the inability to gain timely information, the continuation of this activity during the reporting period remained difficult to verify. The Government allowed foreigners to attend government-sponsored religious services.

There were no reports available on societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the country. Since 2001, the Secretary of State has designated the country a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government raised its concerns about the deplorable state of human rights in the country with bilateral partners and in multilateral forums.

The Government does not allow representatives of foreign governments, journalists, or other invited guests freedom of movement that would enable them to fully assess human rights conditions or confirm reported abuses. This report is based on information from interviews; press reports; South Korean government reports; NGO reports; and missionary, refugee, and defector testimony obtained

over the past decade, supplemented where possible by information drawn from more recent reports from visitors to the country and NGO representatives working on the Chinese border. Refugee and defector testimony is often dated because of the time lapse between departures from the country and contact with organizations able to document human rights conditions. This report cites specific sources and time frames wherever possible, and reports are corroborated to the extent possible. While limited in detail, the information in this report is indicative of the situation with regard to religious freedom in the country in recent years.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 46,500 square miles and a population estimated at 22.7 million. The number of religious believers was unknown but was estimated by the Government in 2001 to be 12,000 Protestants, 10,000 Buddhists, and 800 Catholics. Estimates by South Korean and international church-related groups were considerably higher. In addition, the Chondogyo Young Friends Party, a government-approved group based on a traditional religious movement, had approximately 15,000 practitioners, according to the Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU) 2008 White Paper. According to a South Korean press report, in 2002 the chairman of the Association of North Korean Catholics stated that the Catholic community in the country had no priests but held weekly prayer services at the Changchung Catholic Church in Pyongyang. However, some doubted that all of those attending services were Catholic.

In Pyongyang there are four state-controlled Christian churches: two Protestant churches (Bongsu and Chilgol Churches), the Changchung Roman Catholic Church, and the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. The Chilgol Church is dedicated to the memory of former leader Kim Il-sung's mother, Kang Pan-sok, who was a Presbyterian deaconess. The number of congregants regularly worshipping at these churches is unknown.

The Presbyterian Church of Korea in the Republic of Korea (ROK) has been partnering with the Christian Association in North Korea to rebuild Bongsu Church since 2005. In the fall of 2006, according to press reports, a delegation of 90 Christians from South Korea visited the Bongsu church to celebrate completion of its first phase of renovation. According to religious leaders who traveled to the country, there were Protestant pastors at these churches, although it was not known if they were resident or visiting. In July 2008 South Korea's *Dong-A Ilbo* newspaper reported that 157 members of the Presbyterian Church of Korea visited Pyongyang for another dedication ceremony. The Presbyterian Church in the USA

(PCUSA) has reportedly contributed to humanitarian projects administered by Bongsu Church.

In its July 2002 report to the U.N. Human Rights Committee, the country reported the existence of 500 "family worship centers." However, according to the 2008 KINU White Paper, defectors interviewed were unaware of any such centers. Observers stated that "family worship centers" may be part of the state-controlled Korean Christian Federation, while an unknown number of "underground churches" operate apart from the Federation and are not recognized by the Government. The 2008 KINU White Paper included defector testimonies referencing the existence of underground churches but concluded that their existence is hard to verify. In July 2009 the *Dong-A Ilbo* newspaper reported an estimated 30,000 Christians, while some NGOs and academics estimate there may be up to several hundred thousand underground Christians in the country. Others question the existence of a large-scale underground church or conclude that it is impossible to estimate accurately the number of underground religious believers. Individual underground congregations are reportedly very small and typically confined to private homes. At the same time, some NGOs reported that the individual churches are connected to each other through well-established networks. The regime has not allowed outsiders the access necessary to confirm such claims.

According to the 2008 KINU White Paper, there were an estimated 60 Buddhist temples. Most were regarded as cultural relics, but religious activity was permitted in some. A few Buddhist temples and relics have been renovated or restored in recent years under a broad effort aimed at "preserving the Korean nation's cultural heritage." In 2007 reconstruction was completed on the Shingye or Singyesa (Holy Valley) Temple, which was destroyed during the Korean War. The ROK Government and foreign tourists funded the reconstruction. A South Korean monk, the first to permanently reside in North Korea, has lived at the temple since 2004 but serves primarily as a guide for visiting tourists rather than as a pastor ministering to Buddhists living in the area.

The Government announced in June 2007 that 500 monks and Buddhist followers from South Korea were making day-long pilgrimages to the recently renovated Ryongthong Temple in Kaesong strictly for religious purposes. These visits were discontinued in November 2007, however. Foreign diplomats in Pyongyang who visited the temple were told that the two monks living there may be joined by more. State-controlled press reported on several occasions that Buddhist ceremonies had been carried out in various locations. Official reporting also linked descriptions of such ceremonies with the broader theme of Korean unification.

The Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church opened in Pyongyang in 2006. Kim Jong-il reportedly commissioned the church after he visited an Orthodox cathedral in Russia in 2002. Two North Koreans who studied at the Russian Orthodox Seminary in Moscow were ordained as priests and are serving at the church. The purported aim of the church was primarily to provide pastoral care of Russians in the country, but one religious leader with access to the country speculated that the church likely extended pastoral care to all Orthodox Koreans as well. As with other religious groups, no reliable data exists on the number of Orthodox believers.

Several foreigners residing in Pyongyang attended Korean-language services at the Christian churches on a regular basis. Some foreigners who visited the country stated that church services appeared staged and contained political content supportive of the regime, in addition to religious themes. Foreign legislators attending services in Pyongyang in previous years noted that congregations arrived at and departed services as groups on tour buses, and some observed that they did not include any children. Other foreigners noted that they were not permitted to have contact with congregants. Foreign observers had limited ability to ascertain the level of government control over these groups, but it was generally assumed they were monitored closely. According to the 2008 KINU White Paper, defectors reported being unaware of any recognized religious organizations that maintained branches outside of Pyongyang.

Several schools for religious education exist in the country. There are three-year colleges for training Protestant and Buddhist clergy. A religious studies program also was established at Kim Il-sung University in 1989; its graduates usually worked in the foreign trade sector. In 2000 a Protestant seminary was reopened with assistance from foreign missionary groups. Critics, including at least one foreign sponsor, charged that the Government opened the seminary only to facilitate reception of assistance funds from foreign faith-based NGOs. The Chosun Christian Federation, a religious group believed to be controlled by the Government, contributed to the curriculum used by the seminary. The Chosun Christian League operates the Pyongyang Theological Academy, a graduate institution that trains pastors affiliated with the Korean Christian Federation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," but the Government did not respect this right. In practice, the Government severely restricted religious freedom, including discouraging organized religious activities except those controlled by officially recognized groups. Genuine religious freedom does not exist.

"Juche," often translated as extreme self-reliance, and the cult of personality of Kim Jong-il and his late father Kim Il-sung remained important ideological underpinnings of the regime. Faced with famine and the succession process in the mid-1990s, Kim Jong-il's regime increasingly emphasized a "military-first" policy to gradually replace juche as the de facto ruling logic. Indoctrination was intended to ensure loyalty to the system and the leadership, as well as conformity to the state's ideology and authority. Refusal on religious or other grounds to accept the leader as the supreme authority, who exemplified the state and society's needs, was regarded as opposition to the national interest and sometimes resulted in severe punishment. NGOs reported that citizens were exhorted to glorify Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung.

Since the late 1980s, as a part of the campaign highlighting Kim Il-sung's "benevolent politics," the regime allowed the formation of several government-sponsored religious organizations. Foreigners who met with representatives of these organizations believe that some members are genuinely religious but note that others appear to know little about religious doctrine. According to NGOs, these religious organizations have been organized primarily as counterparts to foreign religious organizations or international aid agencies, rather than as instruments to guarantee and support free religious activities. Since 1992 the Constitution has authorized religious gatherings and provided for "the right to build buildings for religious use." However, only officially recognized religious groups enjoy this right. The Constitution stipulates that religion "should not be used for purposes of dragging in foreign powers or endangering public security." Ownership of Bibles or other religious materials is reportedly illegal and may be punished by imprisonment or execution.

The regime allows some overseas faith-based aid organizations to operate inside the country to provide humanitarian assistance. Such organizations report, however, they are not allowed to proselytize, their contact with nationals is limited and strictly monitored, and government escorts accompany them at all times.

The regime also has allowed a number of high-profile religious leaders to visit the country. In August 2008 Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse and the

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, visited North Korea for four days to meet with high-level government officials, visit relief projects, and preach at the Bongsu Church. In April 2009 two American Christian bands, Casting Crowns and the Annie Moses Band, traveled to and won awards at North Korea's annual Spring Friendship Arts Festival.

In 2008 interreligious exchanges, especially joint restoration projects of religious facilities and large-scale Christian events, took place, but less frequently than in previous years. According to the North Korea Database (NKDB) 2009 White Paper on Religious Freedom in North Korea, 597 South Koreans traveled to North Korea to participate in religious exchanges in 2008.

Some South Korean religious groups visited the country to promote reunification. In May 2007 a South Korean interfaith delegation visited Pyongyang, where it met with the Government's Council of Religionists to discuss reunification of the peninsula. Following instructions from the Vatican, the Catholic members of the delegation refrained from celebrating mass to avoid giving the Eucharist to North Koreans posing as Catholics. In 2008 the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice held a joint mass for peaceful reunification in Pyongyang with 96 South Korean Catholic priests and followers attending. The National Council of Churches in Korea and the North Korean Chosun Christian Federation jointly hosted a prayer gathering for peaceful unification at Bongsu Church in 2008.

Buddhist exchanges also continued in 2008 but were less active than in previous years. As part of exchanges, the Jogye Order association of believers traveled to Pyongyang to discuss with the North Korean Chosun Buddhist Federation the issue of recovering cultural assets.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice severely restricted the practice of religion. The 2008 KINU White Paper indicated the regime utilizes authorized religious entities for external propaganda and political purposes and citizens are strictly barred from entering places of worship. Ordinary citizens consider such sites to be primarily "sightseeing spots for foreigners." KINU concluded that the lack of churches or religious facilities in the provinces indicates that ordinary citizens do not enjoy religious freedom.

Little is known about the day-to-day life of religious persons in the country. Members of government-controlled religious groups did not appear to suffer

discrimination. Some reports claimed, and circumstantial evidence suggested, that many if not most of these groups have been organized by the regime for propaganda and political purposes, including meeting with foreign religious visitors. There have also been reports that funds and goods that are donated to government-approved churches are then channeled through the Korean Workers Party (the only political party in the country). There are unconfirmed reports that nonreligious children of religious believers may be employed in mid-level positions in the Government. In the past, such individuals suffered broad discrimination with sometimes severe penalties or even imprisonment. Members of underground churches or those connected to border missionary activity were reportedly regarded as subversive elements.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government deals harshly with all opponents, including those who engage in religious practices deemed unacceptable by the regime. Religious and human rights groups outside of the country provided numerous reports in previous years that members of underground churches had been arrested, beaten, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 persons were believed to be held in political prison camps in remote areas, some for religious reasons. Prison conditions were harsh, and refugees and defectors who had been in prison stated that prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally were treated worse than other inmates.

NGOs, defectors, and refugees have reported that the Government executed opponents of the regime in recent years. Executed individuals reportedly included some targeted for religious activities such as proselytism and contact with foreigners, South Korean humanitarian or religious groups, or missionaries while in China.

In June 2009 South Korean activists reported that Ri Hyon Ok was publicly executed for distributing Bibles in the city of Ryongchon near the Chinese border. She allegedly was accused of spying and organizing dissidents. These claims could not be independently verified.

Defector reports indicated that the regime increased its investigation, repression, and persecution of unauthorized religious groups in recent years, but access to information on current conditions was limited. Despite these restrictions, reports indicated that contacts with religious personnel both inside the country and across the border in China appeared to be increasing; however, there was not enough data

to determine the size and scope of religious activity. Reports from NGOs, refugees, defectors, and missionaries indicated that, of the many persons engaging in proselytizing, those who had ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border in China, and, specifically those repatriated and found to have contacted foreigners, including Christian missionaries, outside the country have been arrested and subjected to harsh punishment.

The Government reportedly was concerned that faith-based South Korean relief and refugee assistance efforts along the northeast border of China had both humanitarian and political goals, including overthrow of the regime, and alleged that these groups were involved in intelligence gathering. The official Korean Workers Party newspaper criticized "imperialists and reactionaries" for trying to use ideological and cultural infiltration, including religion, to destroy socialism from within.

According to an unconfirmed claim from one foreign Christian NGO, nine North Korean nationals in its network disappeared in 2008. The reason for their reported disappearance was unknown.

In 2006 the Government reportedly sentenced Son Jong-nam to death for espionage. NGOs, however, claimed the sentence against Son was based on his contacts with Christian groups in China, his proselytizing activities, and alleged sharing of information with his brother in the ROK. Son's brother reported that information indicated that Son was alive as of spring 2007. Because the country effectively bars outside observers from investigating such reports, it was not possible to verify the Government's claims about Son Jong-nam's activities or determine whether he had been executed.

The whereabouts of South Korean missionary Kim Dong-shik, who disappeared in 2000 near the country's border with China, remained unknown. North Korean agents allegedly kidnapped him while he was assisting North Korean refugees in China. In 2007 media reported that Kim's wife believed Kim most likely died within a year of his disappearance.

Unverified news reports in recent years indicated the Government increased the reward for information on any person doing missionary work in the Chinese border region. Former North Korean security agents who defected to South Korea reported intensified police activity aimed at halting religious activity at the border.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; no information was available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the country and has no official presence there but sought to address its religious freedom concerns as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The country was first designated a CPC in 2001 and most recently was re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing restrictions to which North Korea is subject pursuant to sections 402 and 409 of the Trade Act of 1974 (the Jackson-Vanik Amendment), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

The U.S. Government raises religious freedom concerns about the country in multilateral forums and bilaterally with other governments, particularly those that have diplomatic relations with the country. The United States has made clear that addressing human rights would have a significant impact on the prospects for closer U.S.-North Korea ties. State Department officials, including staff from the Office of International Religious Freedom, meet regularly with North Korean defectors and with NGOs focused on the country. Since 2006 the U.S. Government has participated in the annual North Korea Freedom Week.

In December 2008 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, which the United States cosponsored, that condemned the country's poor human rights record, expressing "very serious concern" at "continuing reports of systemic, widespread and grave violations of human rights." The resolution called on the country to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it was a party, and it further urged the Government to invite U.N. special representatives to visit and to ensure that humanitarian organizations had free access to the country.

The Department of State continued to support programs that document human rights abuses and increase the availability of outside information in the country, and provided support to NGOs that seek to build the capacity of South Korea-based NGOs in their efforts to improve and expand monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation in the country. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provided regular Korean-language broadcasting.

ECUADOR

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In October 2008, the new Constitution took effect.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 109,483 square miles and a population of 13.4 million, according to the latest projections. The Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church estimates that 85 percent of the population identifies itself as Catholic, with 15 percent of the population actively practicing. The Episcopal Conference estimates attendance at mass rose slightly during the reporting period, as was the case during the previous reporting period, due to increased proselytizing by Catholic clergy. Some groups, particularly indigenous persons who live in the mountains, follow a syncretic form of Catholicism, combining indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities. In the Amazon jungle region, Catholic practices often are combined with elements of shamanism.

Estimates of the number of non-Catholic Christians start at one million. Southern Baptists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals find converts, particularly among indigenous people in the highland provinces of Chimborazo, Bolivar, Cotopaxi, Imbabura, and Pichincha, among persons who practice syncretic religions, as well as in other groups marginalized by society. Evangelical groups include the Assemblies of God, in urban areas, and the Church of the Word of God, which is growing rapidly in indigenous areas. In general, rural indigenous areas tend to be either overwhelmingly Catholic or overwhelmingly Protestant. Protestant

organizations were usually divided between predominantly indigenous organizations, such as the Council of Evangelical Indigenous People and Organizations, and mestizo organizations. Many mestizos in the Guayaquil area are Protestant. In large cities, Protestant megachurches, with more than 10,000 members, continued to experience substantial growth. Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, many of which are not affiliated with a particular denomination. Some multidenominational Christian groups, such as the Gospel Missionary Union, now called Avant Ministries, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesús Bendice (Today Jesus Christ Blesses), have been active for nearly 70 years.

Many registered religious groups have few members, including Anglicans, Baha'is, Buddhists, Episcopalians, Jews, Lutherans, Muslims, Eastern Orthodox believers, Presbyterians, Unification Church members, and followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In October 2008, the new Constitution took effect, which includes provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion, as did the prior constitution. The Constituent Assembly that drafted the Constitution debated several topics with religious undertones such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and the use of God's name in the Constitution. The name of God is invoked in the preamble to the Constitution, same-sex marriage was not included, and interpretations differ on whether the Constitution allows abortion. The new Constitution continues to grant all citizens and foreigners the right to practice publicly and freely the religion of their choice. The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The 1937 Law of Worship requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Government and Police. To register, a religious organization must possess a charter; have nonprofit status; include all names used by the group to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission; and provide signatures of at least 15 members, typically leaders of the organization. In addition, a 2008 presidential decree requires all non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including churches and other religious groups, to register with the

Government, identify their members, and comply with unspecified reporting requirements. All nonprofit organizations, including more than 2,200 registered religious groups, would be required to report on the expenditure of any government funding received.

The Government observes Carnival, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government does not generally permit religious instruction in public schools. Private schools may provide religious instruction, as may parents in the home.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Catholics reportedly complained the Government restricted access for ecological reasons to the Galapagos Islands, resulting in difficulties for foreign missionaries and clergy in ministering to the 14,500 resident Catholics. Additionally, several non-Catholic groups complained that while there was no official state religion, the Catholic Church was the de facto state religion and enjoyed many privileges not available to non-Catholic groups. In 1937, the Government entered into an official legal agreement with the Holy See called the *Modus Vivendi*, which grants the Catholic Church privileges such as official passports for clergy and state funding of churches and schools. Non-Catholic religious groups criticized the use of taxpayer money to fund exclusively Catholic projects because comparable funding was not provided for their organizations.

Religious groups expressed concern over the 2008 presidential decree requiring NGOs to register with the Government. The Government states that the purpose of the decree is to ensure fiscal responsibility with regard to government funding. The Government was planning to convene a roundtable discussion with religious leaders to address their concerns and draft a new Law of Worship differentiating religious groups from NGOs. Some religious groups believed the Government could use the registration process to exert excessive control.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2006, two military officers, Ivan Santi Mucushigua and Cervantes Santamaría Cuji, and a civilian, Lucio Cirilo Dahua, allegedly killed Balti Cadena, a traditional healer (yachak), and injured one of his sons, near the Amazonas Military Fort in Puyo, Pastaza Province. In 2007, the Public Prosecutor in the civilian Pastaza Province Criminal Tribunal ruled it was competent to decide the case, found the men guilty of murder, and imposed a sentence of 16 years on each of them. The defendants appealed the decision before a higher tribunal, the Supreme Court of Justice of Ecuador, which the 2008 Constitution renamed the National Court of Justice. The Court announced it was analyzing the case and would issue a final sentence; at the end of the reporting period the case was pending. The accused men were transferred from a military to a civilian prison.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Many religious groups increased outreach efforts to their counterparts during the reporting period.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with local and visiting leaders representing a broad spectrum of religious groups.

EGYPT

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion, and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are the primary source of legislation.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government declined somewhat during the reporting period, based on the failure to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of increased incidents of sectarian violence. However, there were some positive developments: actions by the courts and the Ministry of Interior that opened the door for the possibility that all of the country's Baha'is would eventually be issued national identification documents that contain a dash or the term "other" in the religious affiliation field. Also, the Court of Cassation granted a Coptic Christian mother custody of her two sons despite their father's conversion to Islam.

The Government continued to sponsor "reconciliation sessions" following sectarian attacks, which generally obviated the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution. This practice contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults. Members of non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Government generally worship without harassment; however, Christians and members of the Baha'i Faith—which the Government does not recognize—face personal and collective discrimination in many areas. The Government detained members of Islamic religious minority groups, including Quranists and Shi'a.

The Government again failed to redress laws and governmental practices that discriminate against Christians, effectively allowing their discriminatory effects and their modeling effect on society to become further entrenched. On June 29, 2009, state security and police forces reportedly instigated a sectarian clash in Boshra, near Beni Suef, when they prevented Christians from praying in an unlicensed church. The Government again failed to prosecute perpetrators of crimes against Copts. For the second consecutive year, a court--while calling for legislative reform to achieve effective protection for freedom of religion and to confront the manipulation of religion--ruled against a convert from Islam to Christianity who had appealed for official recognition of his conversion on the basis of constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion.

The Government's culling of the estimated 300,000 - 400,000 swine in the country had a severe economic impact on Coptic Christian families who rely on pigs and garbage scavenging for their primary income.

Governmental authorities detained and harassed some converts from Islam to Christianity and pressured them to revert to Islam. One convert told U.S. officials that government authorities had raped her. Another convert showed U.S. officials scars from physical abuse he said he had previously suffered in detention, and he subsequently reported further abuse that he said occurred during the reporting period. A court sentenced a Coptic priest to five years of hard labor for officiating at a wedding between a Copt and a convert from Islam who allegedly presented false identification documentation.

There continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report, and the quasi-governmental National Council on Human Rights expressed concern in its fifth report, released in May 2009, over growing sectarian tension. For example, in November 2008 a mob in the Ain Shams district of Cairo attacked and burned an unlicensed Coptic church. In March 2009 a mob in an Upper Egyptian village in Sohag Governorate attacked and set fire to homes belonging to local Baha'is. A policeman who attempted to intervene was seriously injured.

The Ambassador, senior administration officials, and members of Congress continued to raise U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with senior government officials and directly with the Egyptian public. Specifically, embassy officers and other U.S. Department of State officials raised concerns with the Government about ongoing discrimination Christians face in building and maintaining church properties, official discrimination against Baha'is, and the Government's treatment of Muslim citizens who convert to other faiths.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 370,308 square miles and a population of 83 million, of whom almost 90 percent are Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims constitute significantly less than 1 percent of the population. Estimates of the percentage of Christians ranged from 8 to 12 percent (6 to 10 million), the majority of whom belonged to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The country's Jewish community numbers approximately 125, mostly senior citizens.

Other Christian communities include the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian Catholic), Maronite, and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) churches that range in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. A Protestant (known in Arabic as "ingili" or evangelical) community, established in the middle of the 19th century, includes 16 Protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Episcopal (Anglican), Baptist, Brethren, Open Brethren, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), Faith (Al-Eyman), Church of God, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal Al-Masihi), Apostolic, Grace (An-Ni'ma), Pentecostal, Apostolic Grace, Church of Christ, Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), and the Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala)). There are also followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was granted legal status in the 1960s. There are 800 to 1,200 Jehovah's Witnesses and small numbers of Mormons, but the Government does not recognize either group. The number of Baha'is is estimated at 2,000 persons.

Christians are dispersed throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians is higher in Upper Egypt (the southern part of the country) and some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There are many foreign religious groups, especially Roman Catholics and Protestants, who have had a presence in the country for almost a century. These groups engaged in education, social, and development work.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, under article 46, provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government restricts these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion, and Shari'a is the principal source of legislation. A February 2008 lower court ruling interpreted the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom as inapplicable to Muslim citizens who wish to convert to another religion. This ruling, which is not binding on other courts, remained under appeal at the end of the reporting period. Courts ruled in previous years that the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of religion does not apply to Baha'is.

In its January 2008 decision in the case of Muhammad Ahmad Abduh Higazy v. the Minister of Interior et al., the Cairo Administrative Court noted that the country ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which article

18 provides for absolute freedom of religion, with a reservation, namely that the covenant shall be ratified to the extent that it does not conflict with Islamic law.

Although there are no statutory prohibitions on conversion, the Government does not recognize conversions of Muslims to Christianity or other religions, and resistance to such conversions by local officials--through refusal to recognize conversions legally--constitutes a prohibition in practice. The security services reportedly maintain regular and sometimes hostile surveillance of Muslim-born citizens who are suspected of having converted to Christianity. Moreover, in January 2008 the Cairo Administrative Court, a court of first impression, ruled that freedom to convert does not extend to Muslim citizens. It stated that the freedom to practice religious rites is subject to limits, especially the maintenance of public order, public morals, and conformity to the provisions and principles of Islam, which forbid Muslims to convert. The Court stated that "public order" is defined as the official religion being Islam, that most of the population professes Islam, and that Islamic law is the primary source of legislation. The ruling remained under appeal at the end of the reporting period. The Cairo Administrative Court ruled on June 13, 2009, to deny Maher al-Gohary, another Muslim-born convert to Christianity, an identity document indicating his conversion to Christianity.

In January 2008 the Cairo Administrative Court ruled that the Government must issue new identity cards and birth certificates to 13 Christian-born converts to Islam (some whose purpose was to avoid Coptic Church restrictions on divorce) who converted back to Christianity; the documents must indicate that the holder is Christian and "previously embraced Islam." The court held the "recording of a conversion" from Islam to Christianity in the personal identity card does not "establish" the apostasy of the card holder. However, it held that failure to convey the holder's apostasy would conflict with public order, implying that identifying apostates serves as a warning mechanism to the society at large. The nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) Human Rights Watch and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights warned the Government that any such public reference could subject converts to social stigma and discrimination. The Government took no action during the reporting period to implement the order, stating that it is awaiting a Supreme Constitutional Court decision on more than 100 cases filed by other "reconverts" and by several non-governmental entities that opposed the ruling, contending that article 2 of the Constitution, which states that Shari'a is the primary source of legislation, denies Muslims the right to convert from Islam.

On December 21, 2008, the Alexandria Administrative Court ruled that an administrative agency's refusal to provide Fathy Labib Youssef, another "reconvert," an identity document indicating that he is Christian was illegal. At the end of the reporting period, the Government had not provided new identity documents to the plaintiff.

While there is no legal ban on proselytizing Muslims, the Government restricts such efforts. Neither the Constitution nor the Civil and Penal Codes prohibit proselytizing, but police have harassed those accused of proselytizing on charges of ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

For a religious group to be officially recognized, it must submit a request to the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), which determines whether the group would, in its view, pose a threat or upset national unity or social peace. The Department also consults leading religious figures, particularly the pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the sheikh of Al-Azhar. The registration is then referred to the president, who, if he concurs, issues a decree recognizing the new group, according to Law 15 of 1927. If a religious group bypasses the official registration process, participants are potentially subject to detention and could also face prosecution and punishment under article 98(F) of the Penal Code, which forbids the "denigration of religions." There were, however, no reports of the Government prosecuting unregistered religious groups under these provisions. The Government last recognized a new religious group in 1990.

All mosques must be licensed by the Ministry of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf). The Government appoints and pays the salaries of the imams who lead prayers in mosques and monitors their sermons. It does not contribute to the funding of Christian churches. The Ministry of Awqaf reported that there were 100,006 mosques and small dedicated prayer areas called "zawayas" nationwide as of April 2008. A 2004 decree by the Minister of Awqaf removed from governors the authority to issue permits to build mosques and placed private mosques under Awqaf administrative control; however, approximately 5,000 mosques and zawayas remain unsupervised by the Ministry.

The contemporary interpretation of the 1856 Ottoman Hamayouni decree, still partially in force, requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build new churches and synagogues. In addition, MOI regulations, issued in 1934 under the Al-Ezabi decree, specify a set of 10 conditions that the Government must consider before a presidential decree for construction of a new non-Muslim place of worship can be issued. The conditions include the requirement that the distance

that a church may be no closer than 100 meters (340 feet) from a mosque and that approval of the neighboring Muslim community must be obtained before a permit to build a new church may be issued.

In 2005 the President issued Decree 291/2005, which delegated authority to the country's 26 governors to grant permits to Christian denominations that seek to expand or rebuild existing churches. The decree also stated that churches could undertake basic repairs and maintenance subject only to the provision of written notification to local authorities. Decree 291 noted that governors must examine all applications for rebuilding or expansion, which must be supported by unspecified documents, within 30 days of submission. According to the decree, "permits may not be refused except with a justified ruling." Decree 291 also cancelled a 1999 decree aimed at improving the permit process for church repair. (Presidential Decree 453 of 1999 had made the repair of all places of worship subject to a 1976 civil construction code. Although this decree made mosque and church repairs technically subject to the same laws, authorities enforced the laws more strictly for churches.)

Four years after the promulgation of Decree 291/2005, church and human rights leaders complain that many local officials intentionally delay the permit process. They charge that some local authorities refuse to process applications without "supporting documents" that are virtually impossible to obtain (e.g., a presidential decree authorizing the existence of a church that had been established during the country's monarchical era). Others complain that some local authorities categorize routine repairs and maintenance (e.g., painting and plumbing repairs) as expansion/reconstruction projects that require formal permits rather than simple notification. They also maintain that security forces block them from using permits that have been issued and deny them permits for repairs to church buildings. Such practices depend primarily on the attitudes of local security officials and the governorate leadership toward the church, and on their personal relationships with church representatives. As a result, congregations have experienced lengthy delays--years in many cases--while waiting for new building permits.

On April 29, 2009, the Cairo Administrative Court rejected a legal challenge to Decree 291/ 2005. The lawyer who raised the challenge sought to invalidate the decree because he did not believe the Ottoman-era Hamayouni decree gave the President the power to delegate repair or renovation authority to governors. The Court ruled that "enlightened Islamic thinking accepts the presence of non-Muslims as part and parcel of one nation, where they can practice their beliefs

freely and safely within the frame of public order, which regulates relations among individuals as well as their relations with the state."

Some communities, faced with refusal of their requests for permits, use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits. Local authorities sometimes close down such unlicensed places of worship.

Constitutional amendments approved by referendum in March 27, 2007, have unclear implications for religious freedom. The amended article 1 of the Constitution states that the country's political system is based on the principle of citizenship. The amended article 5 prohibits the formation of political parties or the conduct of political activities on a religious basis. Government supporters argued that these changes would separate religion from politics. Some critics, including the opposition Muslim Brotherhood, argued that the amendments are incompatible with article 2, which states that the principles of Shari'a are the primary source for legislation.

The application of family law, including marriage, divorce, alimony, child custody, and burial, is based on an individual's religion. In the practice of family law, the Government recognizes only the three "heavenly religions," Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to Shari'a, Christian families to canon law, and Jewish families to Jewish law. In cases of family law disputes involving a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply Shari'a. The Government does not recognize the marriages of citizens adhering to religions other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Under Shari'a as practiced in the country, non-Muslim males must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, but non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

Under Shari'a as interpreted by the Government, a non-Muslim wife who converts to Islam must divorce her non-Muslim husband. In some cases, upon the wife's conversion, local security authorities reportedly ask the non-Muslim husband if he is willing to convert to Islam; if he chooses not to, divorce proceedings may begin immediately and custody of children is awarded to the mother.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on the Government's interpretation of Shari'a. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance. Christian widows of Muslims have no automatic inheritance rights but may be provided for in testamentary documents.

Under Shari'a, converts from Islam lose all rights of inheritance. Because the Government offers no legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status, the converts' loss of inheritance rights may not be indicated on civil documents.

In the absence of legal means to register their change in religious status, some converts resort to soliciting illicit identity papers, often by submitting fraudulent supporting documents or bribing government clerks who process the documents. Authorities periodically detain and charge converts and their accomplices with violating laws that prohibit the falsification of documents.

The law prescribes administrative steps pursuant to the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. The minor children of such converts, and in some cases adult children who were minors when their parents converted, may automatically become classified as Muslims by the Government irrespective of the religion of the other parent. This practice is in accordance with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, which dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

Government authorities sometimes fail to uphold the law in sensitive conversion cases. In the past local authorities have sometimes allowed custody of a minor Christian female who converts to Islam to be transferred to a Muslim custodian, who is likely to grant approval for a marriage opposed by the girl's Christian parents. During the reporting period, the Government, citing the 2008 amendments to the country's Child Law that do not provide for marriages below age 18, prevented one under-age Christian girl from marrying a Muslim.

According to the Government's Instructions for Notaries Public, which implement Law 114 of 1947, persons age 16 and older may convert to Islam without parental consent. Christian activists assert that ignorance of the law and social pressure, including the centrality of marriage to a woman's identity, often affect a girl's decision to convert. Family conflict and financial pressure also are cited as factors.

The Government no longer requires religious "advice and guidance sessions" in the case of Christian-born converts to Islam. For many years, until 2006, those guidance sessions had been instrumental in resolving disputed conversion cases; in some instances, Christian girls returned to their original faith and families.

Law 263 of 1960, still in force, bans Baha'i institutions and community activities and strips Baha'is of legal recognition. Despite the ban, they are able to engage in

community activities such as an annual new year's celebration. During the Nasser era, the Government confiscated all Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries. The Government requires all citizens to be categorized as Muslims, Christians, or Jews on national identity cards. The MOI has, on rare occasions, reportedly issued documents that list a citizen's religion as "other," or that do not mention religion; however, it is not clear when these conditions apply. Baha'is and other religious groups not associated with any of the three recognized religions have been compelled either to misrepresent themselves or to live without valid identity documents.

In January 2008 the Cairo Administrative Court ruled in three cases brought by Baha'is that the Government must issue official identification documents containing a dash or other mark in the religion field. The Court noted that a purpose of filling the religion field with a dash or other distinctive mark was to protect members of the "revealed religions"--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam--from Baha'i infiltration and avoid potential dangers from such persons' conduct and relations with them. The ruling stated that anyone who adopts the Baha'i Faith is an apostate and that the religion cannot be recorded in any civil status or other official document, because that would conflict with public order. But in April 2009 the MOI issued Decree Number 520 describing procedures for members of unrecognized religious groups to obtain national identity cards with dashes in the religious identification field. In May 2009 the MOI issued birth certificates with a dash in the religion field to two Baha'is who had been involved in the litigation.

Those without valid identity cards also encounter difficulty registering their children in school, opening bank accounts, and establishing businesses. Baha'is at age 16 face additional problems under Law 143/1994, which mandates that all citizens obtain a new national identification card featuring a new identification number. Police occasionally conduct random inspections of identity papers and those found without identity cards can be detained until they produce the document.

The law provides for "khul" divorce, which allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided that she is willing to forego all of her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. Many women have complained that after being granted khul', the required child support is not paid.

The Coptic Orthodox Church excommunicates female members who marry Muslim men and requires that other Christians convert to Coptic Orthodoxy to

marry a member of the Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in cases of adultery or the conversion of one spouse to another religion, or to another Christian denomination.

Civil statutes and religious laws--both Islamic and Coptic--prevent Coptic men from marrying Muslim women. A civil marriage abroad is an option should a Christian male and a Muslim female citizen decide to marry; however, their marriage would not be legally recognized in the country. Additionally, the woman could be arrested and charged with apostasy, and any children from such a marriage could be taken and assigned to the physical custody of a male Muslim guardian, as determined by the Government's interpretation of Shari'a.

The Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1960. Since then it has, to varying degrees, subjected them to harassment and surveillance. The Witnesses were legally registered in Cairo in 1951 and Alexandria in 1956, and their presence in the country dates to the 1930s. The Government attributes its refusal to grant the registration to the Jehovah's Witnesses to the opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which has condemned the group as heretical, as well as to its lingering Nasser-era suspicion of links between Witnesses and the State of Israel.

Various ministries are legally authorized to ban or confiscate books and works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Council of Ministers may order the banning of works it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Center (IRC) of Al-Azhar has legal authority to censor and, since 2004, to confiscate any publications dealing with the Qur'an and the authoritative Islamic traditions (Hadith). In recent years, the IRC has also passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions. Al-Azhar has the legal right to recommend confiscations, but must obtain a court order to do so.

A 2003 Ministry of Justice decree authorizes Al-Azhar sheikhs to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law. There were no reports of the exercise of this authority during the reporting period.

The Government has not granted legal recognition to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), or Mormons, in Cairo. The LDS Church has maintained an organized congregation in the country for more than 30 years. The Government has raised no objection. Some members, particularly those who have converted to the LDS Church overseas and then returned to the country, complain of excessive

surveillance from State Security and sometimes avoid meetings from fear of harassment.

The Government outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood--an Islamist party that operates missionary, charitable, and political activities that threaten NDP rule--in 1954 but has tolerated its operations with varying levels of interference. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views and identify themselves as members of the organization, although they remain subject to arbitrary detention and pressure from the Government.

The Government at times prosecutes members of religious groups whose practices are deemed to deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs and whose activities are alleged to jeopardize communal harmony.

The Government has advised journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitism. Government officials insist that anti-Semitic statements in the media are a reaction to Israeli government actions against Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism; however, there are few public attempts to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiment.

The quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) is charged with furthering protections, raising awareness, and ensuring the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. It is also charged with monitoring enforcement and application of international agreements. Five of its 25 reappointed members and its president, are Copts.

Local media, including state television and radio, regularly include Islamic programming. Christian television programs are aired weekly on state-owned Nile Cultural TV. The weekly religion page of the prominent state-controlled daily *Al-Ahram* often reports on conversions to Islam and claims that converts improved their lives and found peace and moral stability.

The Ministry of Education bans wearing the hijab (Islamic head scarf) in primary schools and allows it only in preparatory and secondary schools upon written request from a girl's parent.

The Government observes Eid Al-Fitr, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Coptic Christmas (January 7) as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to detain, harass, and deny civil documents, including national identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to citizens who convert from Islam to Christianity.

The Government continued to deny civil documents, including national identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community despite a court ruling and a governmental decree ordering it to do so. On March 16, 2009, Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court dismissed legal challenges to a January 2008 lower court decision that the MOI must issue national identification documents to three Baha'i plaintiffs with a dash in the mandatory religious affiliation field. In April, the MOI issued a decree establishing procedures for members of unrecognized religious groups --such as the Baha'i Faith--to obtain national identification documents. Previously, the new computerized identification card would only be issued to individuals who stated their religion as Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. As of June 30, 2009, the Government had not issued national identity cards to any Baha'is. It did grant birth certificates--a preliminary step to issuing national identity cards--during the reporting period to two Baha'is who were plaintiffs in the litigation.

The Government has banned the Muslim Brotherhood since 1954.

During the reporting period the Government refused the Jehovah's Witnesses' continued efforts to be granted legal registration. Representatives from the Jehovah's Witnesses' New York headquarters, accompanied by European colleagues, also visited the National Council for Human Rights, the Arab League, and others (see Abuses of Religious Freedom).

The approval process for church construction continued to be hindered by lengthy delays, often measured in years, during the reporting period. Although Government officials maintained that the President approved all requests for permits presented to him, independent critics charged that delays by the MOI and/or local authorities caused many requests to reach the President slowly or not at all. Some churches have complained that local security officials have blocked church repairs or improvements even when a permit has been issued. Others suggested unequal enforcement of the regulations pertaining to church and mosque projects. Many churches faced difficulty in obtaining permits from provincial officials.

According to statistics published in the Official Gazette, the President issued decrees authorizing construction of five Protestant churches, five Coptic churches, and three Catholic churches as of April 2009. No statistics were available on the number of permit requests made.

On July 13, 2008, Government officials in the Naga' Hammadi district of the Governorate of Qena issued an order suspending government-approved renovations of the Archangel Michael Church in the village of Huw. Government officials justified the suspension of the work by asserting that the renovation amounted to unapproved expansion.

In November 2008, the Government cited "security concerns" for its refusal to issue a permit for Copts in Mit Nama in the Shubra al-Kheima area of the Qalyubiya governorate to build a community center. Although 500 Christian families comprise the community, they have no church and desire the center in order to provide social services to their people.

The Government failed to prosecute anyone in connection with the November 24, 2008, attack on an unlicensed Coptic Church in the Matariya area of Cairo.

Following four years of government refusal of a permit to renovate the Nahdat al-Qadasa Church in the village of al-Muti'a, the Governor of Assuit issued an order approving renovations only after the church collapsed on December 17, 2008. The two-story building, which served nearly 120 Christian families, had not been renovated since it was built in 1930.

On January 22, 2009, a number of Copts living in the town of Qoussiya in Assiut, Upper Egypt, were ordered by local security officials to agree in writing not to convey recently purchased land to the Church.

On March 15, 2009, the Government's Legal Body of Experts, a judicial advisory agency, issued a non-binding report opining that the Government was not obligated to allocate land to Protestant churches for the construction of worship places in Egypt's "new cities." This report was issued in response to the case the "Protestant Denomination in Egypt" filed requesting that the Government allocate land for the construction of churches in recently developed areas. Thousands of Copts live in these new developments that are largely bereft of churches.

On April 2, 2009, security services closed an unlicensed church in Samalut, Minya governorate. The church, built four years ago, served 50 Christian families.

According to media reports, the Government never responded to the church's request for a building permit, submitted after completion of construction.

Local government officials have refused to issue a building permit for a new church in the Arbaeen District of Assiut for a decade, despite a 1997 order from the President and approval from the MOI to issue the permit. The President issued decrees allowing the Coptic Orthodox churches in Assiut's El Hamra District and Burg al Arab, Alexandria Governorate, to construct new churches, but they have been waiting for construction permits to be issued since 1997 and 1988, respectively.

Local government officials in Assiut Governorate revoked a license to reconstruct the church belonging to the Church of the Brethren shortly after the license was granted in June 2001, and construction has been halted for the past seven years. Church representatives reportedly began the application process in 1997, intending to replace their church building, the dilapidated condition of which posed safety hazards. Local police reportedly halted construction after the old building was razed in preparation for constructing the new one.

The MOI continued to prevent renovation of St. John the Baptist Church at Awlad Elias in Sadfa, near Assiut, which began eight years ago. At the end of the reporting period the congregation continued to meet for worship in a tent erected in the small courtyard of the church. The governor of Assiut issued a decree for a permit to undertake renovations in 1999 that was renegotiated with State Security in 2001 to allow for enlargement. Church representatives initiated their request for a renovation permit in 1999.

Governmental authorities blocked renovation of other churches as well, including the Church of Mar Mina near Beni Suef, and the Archangel Mikhail Coptic Church in Ezbet al-Nakhl.

The courts did not rule on the March 2008 appeal of legal counsel for Muhammad Ahmad Abduh Higazy against the January 2008 ruling of the Cairo Administrative Court that the administrative agency of the Civil Status Department was not bound to examine his client's request to have his new religious affiliation, Christianity, recorded on his national identity card. In its ruling, the court wrote that principles of Islamic law forbid Muslims from converting away from Islam, and such conversion would constitute a disparagement of the official state religion and an enticement for other Muslims to convert. The court asserted its duty to "protect public order from the crime of apostasy from Islam and to protect public morals,

especially if the apostate petitions the administration to condone his misdeed and his corrupt caprice." In August 2007 Mohamed Ahmed Higazy and his wife Zeinab had publicly announced that they had converted to Christianity and wished to be legally recognized as such. The ruling maintained a government policy not to provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status.

On June 13, 2009, the Seventh Circuit Court of Administrative Justice ruled against Maher El Gohary, a Muslim convert to Christianity who filed suit in August 2008 seeking government recognition of his conversion, including by changing the required religion space on his national identity card to indicate "Christianity." The court stated that it is necessary for a convert to prove his conversion to the state and that El Gohary had demonstrated behavior that contradicted his claim to be a Christian. This, claimed the court, constituted toying with religion, which is disallowed. The court stated that the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of belief--including freedom to embrace a different religion--is an internal, personal matter and not subject to restrictions. It held, however, that the constitutional guarantee of freedom to practice religious rites is subject to restrictions that may be imposed through regulations that emphasize certain higher interests, especially those related to safeguarding public order and moral values and to protecting the rights and freedoms of others. The court also stated that the country is a state not solely governed by civil law and that it had approved the ICCPR--with its religious freedom guarantees--"taking into consideration the provisions of Islamic Law and the absence of contradiction between these provisions and the Covenant," which means that in the event of a contradiction, Shari'a takes precedence. The court also stated that there is no law authorizing the Coptic Church to certify a citizen's change of religion from Islam to Christianity. Accordingly, the court found that there are legislative shortcomings that constitute a failure to achieve effective protection for freedom of religion and effectively prevent manipulation of religion for personal gain. As a result, the court recommended that Parliament rectify this deficiency.

Although the Administrative Court had requested that El Gohary obtain official Church certification of his conversion, it did not accept the Church's certification as valid, citing the lack of legal authority for the Coptic Church to recognize conversions. Reportedly, it was the first time the Orthodox Church had issued such a certificate. In May 2009 the State Council, a consultative body of the country's Administrative Court, sent a report to the judge expressing opposition to El Gohary's request to change the religious designation on his identity card, and claimed that the case is a threat to societal order and that it violates Shari'a.

El Gohary was threatened by extremists, some of whom have attempted to influence the outcome of his case, demanding that he be charged with apostasy, a crime that does not exist in civil law but is proscribed by Shari'a. In February 2009, according to media reports, when he was requesting legal documents at a local registry office, a government official berated him, which incited some patrons to verbally assault and shove him, and one individual struck El Gohary with a broom. The June 13, 2009 court ruling marked the second time in two years that the country's courts ruled against a convert appealing for official recognition of his conversion on the basis of constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion. At the end of the reporting period, the verdict remained under appeal.

The Government has taken no action to implement a February 2008 ruling of the Supreme Court of Administrative Justice that ordered the Government to issue national identity documents to 12 converts to Christianity who were originally Christian but had converted to Islam; reportedly it will not do so until the Supreme Constitutional Court rules on a number of similar cases. The February 2008 ruling held that the Government must issue national identity documents and birth certificates listing their religion as Christianity and stating that they previously embraced Islam. If the ruling is implemented, some credible human rights organizations maintain the converts will be at risk of significant discrimination by both governmental and societal agents. There are hundreds of pending cases similar converts have brought with the same request. The ruling, which is not subject to appeal, overturned an April 2007 ruling by a lower court that held that the MOI was not obligated to recognize the reconversion to Christianity by Christian-born converts to Islam.

The Government refused entry to one foreigner who worked in development among the Christian communities who, with his family--all U.S. citizens--had been resident in Egypt for 20 years. The Government generally tolerates foreign religious workers on condition that they do not proselytize Muslims. Over the past 15 years the Government has refused reentry, denied residency renewal requests, or expelled expatriates they suspected of engaging in unapproved religious activities.

In recent years, although not during the reporting period, there were reports that the Government harassed Christian clergy and other Christian leaders at the international airport in Cairo, confiscating address books, written materials, and various forms of recordable media while they passed through customs to board flights.

Anti-Semitic sentiments appeared in both the Government-owned and opposition press; however, there have been no violent anti-Semitic incidents in recent years. Anti-Semitic articles and opinion pieces appeared in the print media, and editorial cartoons in the press and electronic media. Anti-Semitism in the media continued, although it was less prevalent than in recent years. Anti-Semitic editorial cartoons and articles depicting demonic images of Israeli leaders, stereotypical images of Jews and Jewish symbols that generally referenced Israel or Zionism, and comparisons of Israeli leaders to Hitler and the Nazis were published throughout the year.

There were no reports during the reporting period of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical.

On April 7, 2009, the Cairo Administrative Court revoked the publishing license of a monthly magazine – *Ibdaa* – after it published the poem *On The Balcony Of Leila Murad*, by Egyptian poet Helmy Salem. In its ruling, the court cited an opinion by Al Azhar's IRC stating that the poem was un-Islamic. The magazine's publisher, the state-run General Egyptian Book Organization, recalled copies of the issue.

In September 2008, state-run television canceled plans to show a 30-episode, Syrian-produced television series dramatizing the life of the Prophet Muhammad after Al Azhar objected because it included depictions of the Prophet.

Two private lawsuits remained pending against author Nawal Al-Sadawi at the end of the reporting period, after the IRC criticized her play, *God Submits his Resignation at the Summit*, as disrespectful to Islam. She remained outside Egypt at the end of the reporting period.

On April 7, 2008 the Alexandria Administrative Court reversed the decision of Anas el-Fiqi, the minister of information, who had banned a veiled anchorwoman from appearing on state television. The court based its ruling on the Constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion and stated that the veil did not threaten public order.

The Government continued to harass citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs. On April 24, security officials at Cairo International Airport prevented Quranist Abdel Latif Said from traveling to the United States to attend a conference. The Quranists are a small group of Muslims considered unorthodox because they

consider only the Qur'an to be authoritative for Islam and discount Hadith and other traditional sources of Islamic law.

The Constitution provides for equal public rights and duties without discrimination based on religion or creed, and in general the Government upholds these constitutional protections. However, the Government discriminates against non-Muslims.

There are no Christians serving as presidents or deans of the country's 17 public universities. On April 12, 2009, the weekly newspaper *Watani* reported that of nearly 700 president, dean, or vice dean positions in the country's public university system, only one position is filled by a Christian. The Government rarely nominates Copts to run in elections as National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates. Christians, who represent between 8 and 12 percent of the population, hold fewer than 2 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly and Shura Council. In November 2008, *Al Youm Al Saba*, an Internet news service, reported that the number of Copts accepted in the National Police Academy for the year 2008-2009 was 24 out of 1,600.

As of June 30, 2008, there were six Christians (five appointed, one elected) in the 454-seat People's Assembly; six Christians (all appointed) in the 264-seat Shura Council; two in the 32-member cabinet; and one governor of the country's 28 was Christian. There are few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. Public funds compensate Muslim imams but not Christian clergy.

The Government discriminates against Christians in public sector hiring and staff appointments to public universities, and bars them from studying at Al-Azhar University, a publicly funded institution with approximately half a million students. In general, the Government bars non-Muslims from employment in public university training programs for Arabic language teachers because the curriculum involves study of the Qur'an.

On March 1, 2008, the Supreme Administrative Court upheld a lower court ruling requiring the Coptic Church to allow remarriage following a civil court divorce order. The Coptic Church opposed the Court's order and was reportedly considering legal options at the end of the reporting period.

The Government continued to sponsor "reconciliation sessions" following sectarian attacks that generally obviate the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and preclude their recourse to the judicial system for restitution. In

conjunction with reconciliation sessions, the courts sometimes gave lenient sentences to the perpetrators. For example, on October 5, 2008, the Minya Criminal Court sentenced a Muslim assailant who stabbed a Copt to death to a one-year suspended sentence following a reconciliation session at which the family of the killer promised to pay indemnity to the victim's family.

The National Council for Human Rights issued a report in July 2008 criticizing the Government's practice of addressing sectarian attacks "solely with reconciliation sessions and security solutions." The NCHR urged the Government to guarantee "accountability for the events; reveal the facts surrounding the battle that took place, the man who was killed, and the others who were injured; and bring the perpetrators to trial and punish them." At the end of the reporting period, the Government had issued no comment on the report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On October 27, 2008, security officials in the governorate of Sharqiya arrested Quranist blogger Reda Abdel-Rahman. Police raided Abdel-Rahman's home and confiscated his personal computer, books, CDs, and cassette tapes before taking him to an unknown location. Despite multiple court rulings ordering his release, Abdel-Rahman was held until January 22. Security officials reportedly subjected him to physical and mental abuse in detention, and there has been no government response to investigate and potentially prosecute the officials.

Although there are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, there were occasional reports that police persecuted converts from Islam to Christianity.

On December 13, 2008, airport security officials arrested a convert from Islam to Christianity, along with her husband and their two sons, ages 2 and 4, while they were trying to board a flight to Russia. Officials charged her with carrying a false identification document. The convert subsequently told U.S. officials that state security officials raped her multiple times and subjected her to other physical and mental abuse during her detention in January 2009 to pressure her to revert to Islam. Although her husband and sons were released after four days in custody, she was held until January 22, 2009, when a judge granted bail and ordered her release. Before granting bail, a judge reportedly told her he would have killed her if the law permitted. Upon her release, she was reportedly thrown from a moving vehicle and subsequently went into hiding, where she remained at the end of the

reporting period. Two employees of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Alexandria were arrested on suspicion of providing her forged identity documents.

A male convert from Islam to Christianity told U.S. officials that agents of State Security had detained him on multiple occasions over several years, including during the reporting period. The convert stated that authorities had subjected him to severe physical and mental abuse; he said the officers called him an apostate (*murtadd*), told him he was suffering as a result of his conversion, and pressured him to revert to Islam. The convert stated that during the reporting period state security officers beat his wife on the abdomen while she was pregnant, causing her to hemorrhage. He also showed officials scars purportedly inflicted by governmental interrogators in previous years, including long scars on his back and sides and numerous deep, circular scars on his shoulder, reportedly caused by state security officers holding burning cigarettes against his flesh for long periods of time.

On October 5, 2007, authorities released five men affiliated with the Quranist movement who had been arrested four months before. One detainee reported to a lawyer representing an independent human rights organization that prior to June 30, 2007, a state security investigator had beaten him and threatened him with rape. There was no government response to investigate and potentially prosecute the official.

As of the close of the reporting period, the Government had not prosecuted any of the Bedouin villagers who assaulted the Abu Fana monastery in May 2008, and those who concurrently kidnapped, physically abused, and reportedly attempted forcefully to convert several monks. The armed assault also resulted in the death of one Muslim man, as well as multiple injuries including gunshot wounds to monks and the destruction of the chapel, artifacts, and some of the monks' cells. The NCHR investigated the attack, which according to independent human rights groups had its origin in a land dispute. Authorities continued to detain without charges two Copts arrested in connection with the death of a Muslim villager, brothers Refaat and Ibrahim Fawzy Abdo, despite a December 2008 court order requiring their release. Police were reportedly slow to respond to the attack, but since the attack have reportedly maintained a presence on the road leading to the monastery. The three monks abducted from the monastery were reportedly rescued by security services. Reports also claimed the two brothers were being detained to pressure Coptic authorities not to press for official prosecution of the perpetrators. Human rights advocates reported that this instance exemplifies an increasingly prevalent pattern of governmental authorities detaining Copts

following sectarian attacks and either holding them without charges or threatening false charges and a police record; the detentions serve as a tool to blackmail Coptic authorities to desist from calling for official action to prosecute the perpetrators, and to dissuade the victims and/or their families from seeking recourse in the judicial system for restitution of damages.

Jehovah's Witness leadership reported regular Government harassment and interrogation of Witnesses during the reporting period and efforts to induce some into becoming informers. State security officers reportedly threatened several witnesses that harassment would revert to former elevated levels if they refused to cooperate by providing information including the identity and activities of Witnesses, including those who conduct baptisms. Authorities also reportedly confiscated literature and personal Bibles from visiting foreign Witnesses. State security authorities reportedly monitored the homes, telephones, and meeting places of Jehovah's Witnesses. According to senior international Witness leadership, however, there were some improvements, including permission for groups of up to 30 to meet, and a cessation of harassment of Witnesses in Alexandria since May 2008. They previously reported that at least three Witnesses were beaten while in police custody in 2007. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported varying degrees of harassment and surveillance by government agents since 1960, but senior international Witness leaders believed that their engagement with the Government over the past three years concerning their request for official recognition had resulted in diminished harassment and hostile surveillance.

On April 13, 2009, police arrested convert to Christianity Raheal Henen Mussa, reportedly for possession of a false identification document. She was held for four days and then released into the custody of her parents.

On February 1, 2009, police arrested two citizens at the Cairo International Book Fair for distributing Bibles. The men were released after several days.

On October 18, 2008, in Al Fayoum, police arrested a woman and two men on suspicion that they had distributed Christian tapes and publications. The three were released one day later without charges.

On August 17, 2008, a police officer assigned to guard the Archangel Michael Church in Dhasha, located in the Sumusta district of the governorate of Beni Suef, assaulted three women who were assisting with Government-approved renovations. On August 17 and 18, 2008, police arrested six Copts who also had been assisting with renovations. The Copts were questioned and released. The

police officer was also briefly detained on assault charges, but authorities released him with no charges pending.

In February 2008, the Public Prosecutor ordered the release without charges of 25 members of the Islamic Al-Ahbash sect, including three Lebanese and a Kazakh, who had been arrested in December 2007 on charges of membership in an illegal organization and contempt for religion. The expatriates were reportedly deported.

On November 22, 2007, police detained Siham Ibrahim Muhammad Hassan al-Sharqawi, a Muslim convert to Christianity, on the outskirts of Qena, 300 miles south of Cairo. She had been in hiding since 2003. She was interrogated for four days and released.

On July 15, 2007, a female convert from Islam to Christianity, police rescued Shaimaa Muhammad al-Sayed from assailants who beat her in public, but police arrested her after her father, who was one of the assailants, informed them that she was a convert to Christianity and that he had previously filed a missing persons report on her. She was found to be in possession of a counterfeit identity card listing her religion as Christianity and held on charges of falsifying a government document. The Office of the Prosecutor General, Supreme State Security Prosecution, in Cairo ordered her release on July 22, 2007, and confiscated both her original identity card and the counterfeit one. According to credible reports, after her release, her father beat her in front of the police station.

Emad Adib Atiya Suleiman, a Christian married to a convert to Christianity, remained in "administrative detention." On August 16, 2008, the Supreme State Security Emergency Court revoked a 2007 detention order that was based on "a romantic relationship between the aforementioned and a Muslim woman living in the same area." The Ministry of Interior has not yet complied with the revocation of the detention order, and Suleiman remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

An estimated several thousand persons remained imprisoned during the reporting period because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government stated that these persons were in detention because of membership in or activities on behalf of violent extremist groups, without regard to their religious affiliation. Internal security services monitor groups and individuals suspected of involvement in or planning for extremist activity. Internal security agencies regularly detain such persons, and the

ongoing state of emergency allows them to renew periods of "administrative detention" indefinitely.

On August 8, 2007, police detained Adel Fawzi Faltas Hanna, a retired doctor and president of the Middle East Christian Association's (MECA) Egyptian branch, and Peter Ezzat Hanna, a photographer for MECA and the Copts United website. The Government investigated the two men's activities on charges including the denigration of Islam and disturbing the public order. On July 7, 2007, Nader Fawzi, in his capacity as president of MECA, had filed a lawsuit naming the President and five senior ministers as defendants, accusing the Government of failing to properly investigate the al-Kosheh incident of January 1-3, 2000, in which 21 Copts were killed, others injured, and Copt properties destroyed. The perpetrators were not brought to justice and no indemnity was paid to the victims or their families. In August 2007, police also raided the Cairo homes of Adel Fawzi and Peter Ezzat and reportedly confiscated several copies of a MECA publication, *The Persecuted: The Story of the Coptic Nation*. On November 4, authorities released Adel Fawzi and Peter Ezzat following three months in detention. On November 5, 2007, authorities arrested three other MECA affiliates under investigation for a variety of alleged offenses, including denigrating Islam. On December 26, 2007, authorities released the three men without charges.

On January 22, 2009, six Christian brothers were sentenced to three years in prison on charges of "resisting arrest" and "assaulting authorities." Christian activists asserted that the brothers were prosecuted for failing to close their café during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Independent human rights groups have been unable to link the incident to sectarian motives, noting that other Christian-owned cafés remained open during Ramadan without harassment. Police raided the brothers' café in Port Sa'id on September 8, 2008, damaging the café and injuring several of them.

On December 11, 2008, the Esna Court in Upper Egypt sentenced a Copt shopkeeper to one month in prison for impersonating a police officer and trying to remove the veil of a woman he suspected of shoplifting. After he attempted to stop the woman from fleeing, Muslim assailants attacked Copt properties for which the Government ordered the payment of a total of \$230,000 (1.26 million Egyptian pounds) as indemnity to Christian business owners who suffered losses.

On October 12, 2008, Giza criminal court sentenced Coptic priest Mita'us Wahba to five years in prison with "forced labor" for officiating at a wedding between a Copt and a Muslim convert to Christianity. The court found Father Wahba

criminally liable for accepting an allegedly false identification document the convert presented. Wahba appealed but remained in prison at the end of the reporting period.

On November 29, 2008, authorities released Bahya Nagy Ibrahim when the Public Prosecutor enjoined the execution of her three-year prison sentence pursuant to her September 17, 2008, conviction on allegations of "knowingly using a false identification document." The charge stemmed from her father's brief conversion to Islam in 1962. She had listed her religion as Christian on her marriage certificate in 1978, not knowing that her father's brief conversion to Islam in 1962 made her official religion Islam, according to the country's interpretation of Islamic law. On November 21, 2007, her sister Shadia Nagy Ibrahim was sentenced to three years in prison on allegations of falsely claiming to be Christian, a charge arising from her father's brief conversion to Islam in 1962. The Public Prosecutor ordered her release on January 13, 2008. The two sisters remained free at the end of the reporting period.

On November 11, 2008 the Shubra Criminal Court sentenced three people to three years in prison each for helping a Muslim woman obtain a counterfeit national identity card that indicated her religion as Christian to facilitate her marriage to a Christian. The defendants appealed but were serving their sentences at the end of the reporting period.

On March 12, 2007, the Alexandria Court of Appeal upheld the conviction of 22-year-old student blogger Abdel Karim Nabil Suleiman. On February 22, 2007, the Alexandria Criminal Court convicted him of "denigrating" Islam and insulting the President through his blog entries and sentenced him to four years in prison (three for denigrating Islam and one for insulting the President). On November 6, 2006, Alexandria security forces arrested Abdel Karim, whose blog entries had contained strongly worded critiques of the practice of Islam and Al-Azhar's Sunni Muslim orthodoxy. Abdel Karim had previously been detained on account of his writings for 18 days in October 2005. He had been expelled and reported to the authorities by Al-Azhar University for criticizing Islamic authority. He remained in prison at the end of the reporting period.

On April 26, 2009, Government security forces demolished a building the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Marsa Matrouh had recently bought to serve as a parish social services center. According to media reports, security forces claimed a brick fence on the roof of the one-story building exceeded the height approved by local government. At the end of the reporting period, there were no reports of

governmental intention to investigate the conduct of the security forces who carried out the demolition.

Following the outbreak of the A/H1N1 influenza virus, initially dubbed "swine flu," the Government ordered the culling of the country's estimated 400,000 swine population to begin on May 1, 2009. After the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization announced that the slaughter of the animals would have no affect on the circulation of the A/H1N1 virus, the Ministry of Health admitted, according to *Al-Masry Al-Yom* and other newspapers, that the country exploited the international spread of the virus to put an end to what it termed the disorderly and unhygienic raising of pigs in congested urban areas. Ministry of Health spokesman Abdulrahman Shaheen affirmed that the decision to slaughter all the pigs was more to safeguard public health than a precautionary measure in confronting the virus. However some observers identified a sectarian motive for the action. The Government's culling of the swine had a severe economic impact on Coptic Christian families who rely on pigs and garbage scavenging for their primary income.

On March 28, 2009, a local council in Maghagha, Minya governorate demolished part of a 10-acre Coptic cemetery, destroying graves.

On November 20, 2008, authorities demolished a Coptic social services building owned by the Coptic Church in Alexandria. Local authorities demolished the building because they alleged it had been built without a permit.

Forced Religious Conversion

On June 21, 2009, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) made reference to a 2007 report by Human Rights Watch which asserted that in 2007 there were 89 cases of Egyptian citizens whose religious affiliation had been changed in official documents to Islam against their will, after their fathers converted to Islam. The 2007 report also asserted that in violation of the law, the MOI refused to change their religious affiliation to Christianity when they reached the age of 15.

On June 15, 2009, the Court of Cassation ruled to grant Kamilia Lotfy, a Coptic Christian, custody of her two sons despite their father's conversion to Islam. By also ruling that the religious identity of the children should remain Muslim, the Court failed to address the discriminatory policy of forcibly changing the religious affiliation of Christian children recorded on official documents when their father

converted to Islam. The Court also rejected the argument of the Government Public Prosecutor that, based on Shari'a, Christian-born children older than seven whose fathers converted to Islam should have the freedom to choose their religion. The Court also stated that the children could be removed from the custody of their mother if there were "fears for the child's faith." The decision overturned a September 2008 ruling by the Alexandria Appeals Court, which had awarded custody of the 15-year-old twins, Andrew and Mario Medhat Ramses, to their father based upon his conversion to Islam, stating that "Islam is the best religion." Human rights groups observed that the Court chose to legitimize discrimination in the name of Islam and missed an unprecedented opportunity to reconcile Shari'a with Constitutional provisions for citizen rights, but the groups did praise the court's decision to leave the children in their mother's custody. The mother's legal battle over custody and alimony support spans five years.

As in previous years, there were occasional claims of Muslim men forcing Coptic women and girls to convert to Islam. Reports of such cases were disputed and often included inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, found it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a Muslim male. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media. In recent years, there have been no independently verified claims of forced conversions of this nature.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who may have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

As previously noted, the Court of Cassation ruled to grant Coptic Christian Kamilia Lotfy custody of her two sons despite their father's conversion to Islam. The ruling overturned an appeals court decision, which had followed court precedent in holding that her twins be removed from her. The country's highest court set another positive precedent when it implemented a stipulation of the country's Personal Status Law affirming the right of a non-Muslim mother to retain custody of her children until the age of 15, even when the father has converted to Islam and the state has consequently changed the child's religion to Islam. These positive steps were mitigated by other elements of the Court's decision, however. (See also Abuses, Forced Religious Conversion.)

In May 2009 the NCHR released its fifth annual report, focusing on the increase of sectarian tensions and recommending enactment of anti-discrimination legislation. The NCHR also urged the People's Assembly to enact a "unified places of worship bill" to create a uniform approval process for the construction of mosques and churches.

On April 14, 2009, the Ministry of Interior issued a decree establishing procedures for members of unrecognized religious groups to obtain identification documents. On March 16, 2009, the Supreme Administrative Court rejected a final legal challenge blocking implementation of a January 2008 Cairo Administrative Court ruling that the Government must issue national identification documents to three Baha'i plaintiffs containing a dash or other mark in the religion field. Since the 2008 decision, the Government has reportedly issued birth certificates to several Baha'is, documents which it previously refused to issue them. However, as of the end of the reporting period, the Government had only issued national identification documents to two Baha'is involved in the litigation.

On December 29, 2008, the Cairo Personal Status Appellate Court issued a ruling that affirmed the right of a Christian woman to be awarded custody of her Muslim children because the Muslim father was aware of her Christian faith at the time of their marriage. In granting the French mother custody, the court based its decision on the country's Child Law, which states that the protection and best interest of the child are to be given precedence in all cases concerning children.

The governor of Marsa Matrouh issued a decree in July 2008 allocating a plot of land to the Marina Church in Alamein for church construction.

In October 2008 the Government's Tanta University inaugurated a new course of study called "Coptic Studies."

On November 17, 2008, the MOI issued a decree appointing a Coptic woman as mayor of Kambouha Village in Assuit Governorate.

On November 11, 2008, in compliance with a ruling of the Alexandria Administrative Court, the Government issued a birth certificate to a Baha'i university student. Prior to the ruling, governmental agencies had refused to provide the student any identity documents, leaving him unable to register to complete his studies.

In December 2008 the governorate of Fayoum paid compensation to Copts who suffered property damage in a June 2008 confrontation with Muslim neighbors.

On January 11, 2009, the Ministry of Education postponed exams in primary and preparatory schools to permit Coptic students to celebrate Orthodox Christmas. In January 2009 the Ministry of Manpower and Migration extended to the private sector a previous decree designating Orthodox Christmas a holiday for public sector workers.

On February 27, 2009, local authorities enforced the 2008 Child Law and barred a 16-year-old Christian girl from marrying her Muslim boyfriend, as the revised law prohibits marriage before the age of 18. The 16-year-old girl reportedly had sought to marry to escape a difficult home environment.

In March 2009 independent newspaper *Al Masry Al Youm* reported that Baha'i citizens celebrated their New Year publicly without interference.

The daily independent *al-Masry al-Youm* reported that Minister of Culture Farouq Hosni, during an October 28, 2008 meeting with members of the British Egyptian Business Association, called for acceptance of "the earthly religions [*al-adyaan al-ardiyya*]" as part of the exercise of freedom of belief. The term is normally used to refer to religions or beliefs other than Islam, Christianity, or Judaism.

On April 24, 2009, the country's Embassy in Saudi Arabia celebrated Coptic Easter for the first time.

On April 26, 2009, *al-Gomhouriya*, a government-owned newspaper, began devoting a section to Coptic issues.

The annual dialogue between the Vatican's Joint Committee for Dialogue and the Permanent Committee of al-Azhar for Dialogue among the Monotheistic Religions was held at the Vatican in February, 2009.

On November 18, 2008, Al Azhar and the British Anglican Church began the 10th session of their interfaith dialogue.

On September 4, 2008, the Cairo Administrative Court dismissed a lawsuit filed by a private individual seeking the dismissal of a Cairo University Faculty of Religion lecturer, alleging that his lectures were insulting to Islam. The court based its

decision on the rights of freedom of opinion and expression afforded to citizens by article 47 of the Constitution.

On December 21, 2008, the Alexandria Administrative Court ruled that an administrative agency's refusal to provide an identity document to Fathy Labib Youssef, a Coptic-born "reconvert" from Islam to Christianity, indicating that he is Christian, was illegal. At the end of the reporting period, however, the Government had not issued him the identification documents he requested.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Violent sectarian attacks on Copts and Baha'is increased during the reporting period. The NCHR, in its annual report, issued in May 2009, expressed concern over the increase in sectarian tensions in Egypt, including a March 2009 attack on Baha'i villagers in Upper Egypt. The NCHR called for new legislation to address all forms of discrimination. The EIPR reported a sharp increase in interreligious violence, both in frequency and geographical distribution.

On April 14, 2009, cleric Muhammad Al-Zughbi, a citizen, gave an address which aired on the private, Salafist-oriented *Al-Rahma* TV in which he stated: "I call upon our leader- -and I pray that Allah enables this--to annihilate them [the Iranians], along with the Baha'is in our country, in order to purify the land of their filth, for the sake of future generations."

On March 28, 2009, a mob of Muslim neighbors attacked the homes of seven Baha'i families in the village of al-Shuraniya in Sohag governorate. The attack occurred after the broadcast of a popular television talk show that included an appearance by a Baha'i from the village. Muslim villagers, some of them related to the Baha'i villagers, attacked Baha'i houses with bricks and rocks until police dispersed them. The police made no arrests. On March 31, the attacks escalated when attackers returned and set fire to the homes, forcing the Baha'is to flee. The police arrested six villagers from the mob. The incident was covered extensively in the Egyptian media. Much of the coverage was sympathetic to the Baha'is. At the end of the reporting period, there were no reports of governmental intention to investigate and potentially prosecute the perpetrators.

The issuance by a Coptic priest of a conversion certificate to a former Muslim drew an angry reaction from some Islamist lawyers. On April 11, 2009, attorneys representing Maher Al-Gohary in his case seeking government acknowledgment of his conversion reportedly presented the certificate to a court clerk, as requested by

the judge. However, the judge later declared that the Church lacked the legal authority to issue the document. It has long been the practice of Coptic priests, fearing reprisals, not to issue certificates of baptism or conversion; converts must travel abroad to obtain them. Islamist lawyers Moustafa Al-Alshak`a, Hamid Sadiq, and Youssef Al-Badri had threatened Al-Gohary and his attorneys. Several clerics reportedly issued fatwas (legal opinions) against both Al-Gohary and the Coptic priest who issued the baptismal certificate.

At least one sectarian clash was related to the construction of a church. On November 23, 2008, hundreds of Muslims attacked an unlicensed, recently consecrated Coptic Church in a renovated factory in Cairo's Ain Shams district. According to media reports, 13 police and Copts were injured in the attack. Police arrested five Muslims and three Copts on charges of unlawful assembly and disturbing the peace. All were released without charges on November 27.

Other clashes resulted from personal disputes. On December 15, an argument between a Muslim and a Christian escalated into violent clashes between Muslim and Copt families from the Al-Zarayib area in Al-Khosou. Security forces arrested four Muslims and four Christians, who were all released after a few days of detention. On December 16, security forces broke into the houses of four Coptic families and detained two men and five women, reportedly mistreating them in the effort to determine responsibility for the clash.

On April 5, 2009, sectarian tensions flared in Alexandria governorate when hundreds of Muslims damaged Christian-owned shops, hurling stones at the shops and destroying them with sticks. The attacks followed the death of a Muslim man who reportedly was stabbed to death in a fight with Coptic neighbors.

There were at least six similar incidents in Minya Governorate in the villages of Dier El Barsha, Dafash, Sila al-Gharbya, Kom El Mahras, Al Tayeba, and Abou Korkas.

Other incidents involved land disputes that led to sectarian hostility. On July 20 and 21, 2008, Muslim assailants destroyed crops and damaged a house belonging to Copts living in 'Izbat Bushra al-Sharqiya in Beni Sueif governorate. The attacks followed a land title dispute involving Muslim villagers. At the end of the reporting period, police had made no arrests and there were no reports of governmental intention to investigate and potentially prosecute the perpetrators.

Other incidents involved allegations of sexual harassment or romantic relationships. On October 4, 2008, a Copt was shot to death and four others injured (three Christians and one Muslim) when villagers fought with guns, bricks, and sticks in the village of al-Tayeba, near Minya, following the alleged harassment of a Coptic woman by a Muslim man. The family of the slain Christian received some compensation, but his accused killer, a Muslim, was acquitted of murder charges on May 4.

On October 19, 2008, five Copts assaulted members of a Muslim family in the district of Sidi Salem in the Kafr al-Sheikh governorate, following rumors that a Coptic girl from their family had run away with a member of the Muslim family. Coptic Church officials later said the girl had converted to Islam and married a Muslim, and security forces banished a number of Christians involved in the assault from the village.

On March 4, 2009, clashes occurred in Dama's Village, Miet Ghamer, in northern Egypt after rumors spread that a Muslim woman was involved romantically with a Copt. A Muslim doused the Copt with gasoline and set him on fire, killing him. The Copt's father also died in the fighting. On March 12, local media reported that two Muslims were detained in connection with the killings. On March 15, police found the body of another Copt who had been missing for 15 days. According to media reports, he appeared to have been tortured before he was killed. Police arrested several suspects who allegedly killed the Copt because they believed he had harassed a Muslim girl. At the end of the reporting period, police had made no arrests in the cases of the Copt who was burned to death and his father, and there were no reports of any governmental intention to investigate and potentially prosecute the perpetrators.

On October 7, 2008, Cairo police arrested a Copt who allegedly killed his future Muslim brother-in-law and shot and injured his sister because he opposed their marriage.

Muslim convert Muhammad al-Higazy remained out of public view throughout the year, reportedly fearing for his personal security following public death threats he received from his family and societal elements when he sued the Government in 2007 to acknowledge his conversion by issuing him identity documents that list his religion as Christianity. Maher Al-Gohary, another convert to Christianity who sued for the same right during the reporting period, also claims to live in hiding and has stated that he and his daughter have also received death threats. A female convert to Christianity who reported that she was severely abused while in state

security detention fled when she was released on bail pursuant to official allegations that she procured a counterfeit identity document listing her religion as Christianity. She remained in hiding at the end of the reporting period, fearing abuse from her family and government forces.

On March 27, 2009 the Ibn Khaldoun Center hosted an anti-discrimination conference that examined ways toward a secular society. Egyptian Muslim convert to Christianity Mohammad Hegazy appeared and spoke about the problems facing Muslim-born converts to Christianity in the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialogue. The right of religious freedom has been raised with senior government officials by all levels of the U.S. Government, including members of Congress, the Secretary of State, the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, the Ambassador, and other Department of State and embassy officials. The Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy also regularly discusses religious freedom matters with other government officials, including governors and members of Parliament. The Ambassador has made public statements supporting religious freedom, interfaith understanding, and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all religious groups. Specifically, the Embassy and other Department of State officials raised concerns with the Government about ongoing discrimination Christians face in building and maintaining church properties despite Decree 291 of 2005; official discrimination against Baha'is; and the Government's treatment of Muslim citizens who wish to convert.

U.S. embassy officials maintain an active dialogue with leaders of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. U.S. embassy officials investigate complaints of official religious discrimination brought to its attention. They also discuss religious freedom matters with a range of contacts, including academics, businessmen, and citizens outside the capital area. U.S. officials actively challenge anti-Semitic articles in the media through discussions with editors-in-chief and journalists.

U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom, including funding for programs of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services that work with Coptic and Muslim community

groups in Upper Egypt, as well as support for NGOs that monitor the country's media for occurrences of sectarian bias.

The U.S. Government is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promotes religious tolerance, and supporting projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between different religious communities.

The Embassy supports the development of educational materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums.

Embassy officials also worked with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.

EL SALVADOR

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 8,108 square miles. According to the 2007 census, the population is 5.7 million. The country is predominantly Roman Catholic, with a sizeable Protestant minority. There are also small communities of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists, among others. A very small segment of the population observes indigenous religious practices. Some Catholic rituals incorporate indigenous elements.

According to a December 2008 survey by the Public Opinion Center of the Technological University of El Salvador, 52.6 percent of the population identifies itself as Catholic. There are several different Catholic groups, including a charismatic renewal group that reportedly constitutes more than 6 percent of all Catholics. Members of Protestant churches compose 27.9 percent of the population. Among Protestants, informal church estimates suggest 35 percent are Baptists or members of Assemblies of God.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution states that

all persons are equal before the law and prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, gender, or religion.

Article 296 of the Penal Code imposes criminal sentences of six months to two years on those who publicly offend or insult the religious beliefs of others, or damage or destroy religious objects. If such acts are carried out with and for the purpose of publicity, sentences increase to one to three years in prison. Repeat offenders face prison sentences of three to eight years.

The Constitution requires the president, cabinet ministers and vice ministers, Supreme Court justices, judges, governors, the attorney general, the public defender, and other senior government officials to be laypersons. In addition, the Electoral Code requires judges of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and members of municipal councils to be laypersons.

A 1940 law established Holy Week holidays for public employees, and each year the Legislative Assembly issues a decree establishing Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday as official holidays for the private sector.

The Constitution explicitly recognizes the Roman Catholic Church and grants it special legal status, but also allows other religious groups to obtain legal status.

Regulations implementing the tax law grant tax-exempt status to recognized non-Catholic churches and other religious groups. The regulations also make donations to recognized churches tax-deductible.

The law for nonprofit organizations and foundations charges the Ministry of Governance with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-Catholic churches, and other religious groups. The law specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church from this registration requirement. During the reporting period, there were 157 requests for new registration, of which 43 were approved, 108 were pending, one withdrew due to lack of documentation, and five did not complete the process.

The law states that religious groups other than the Catholic Church may register for official status. Although not required to register with the Government, a group must do so to incorporate formally. The Civil Code grants equal status to churches and nonprofit foundations. For formal recognition, an organization or religious group must apply through the Office of the Director General for Nonprofit Associations and Foundations (DGFASFL) within the Ministry of Governance.

The group must present its constitution and bylaws that describe, among other things, the type of organization, location of offices, goals and principles, requirements for membership, type and function of ruling bodies, and assessments or dues. Before the DGFASFL can grant registration, it must determine that the group's constitution and bylaws do not violate the law. Once a group is registered, notice of DGFASFL approval and the group's constitution and bylaws must be published in the official gazette. The DGFASFL does not maintain records on religious organizations once their status has been approved.

Noncitizens present in the country primarily to proselytize must obtain a special residence visa for religious activities and are not allowed to proselytize while on a visitor or tourist visa.

Public education is secular. Private religious schools operate freely. All private schools, whether religious or secular, must meet the same standards to obtain Ministry of Education approval.

The President attended different religious ceremonies to promote interfaith understanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Leaders of the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical, Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhist religious groups participate in the Council of Religions for Peace.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials maintained a regular dialogue with principal religious leaders, church officers, church-sponsored universities, and NGOs.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 10,827 square miles and a population of 750,000. Christians account for approximately 93 percent of the population, of whom Roman Catholics constitute 87 percent; 6 percent belongs to Protestant and independent denominations. Many Catholics reportedly also follow traditional beliefs. Five percent of the population practices indigenous religious beliefs exclusively. Muslims, Baha'is, and practitioners of other religious beliefs each constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The number of Muslims is increasing due to the growing number of West African and Middle Eastern immigrants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, the Government remains sensitive to criticism, and church leaders usually avoid discussions that could be construed as critical of the Government or government officials. The Constitution specifically mentions support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

The Government generally allows preaching, religious teaching, education, and practice by believers. The Government requires religious groups to obtain permission for any activities outside the confines of places of worship; however, in practice this requirement does not appear to hinder organized religious groups from holding retreats and other meetings. Door-to-door evangelism reportedly occurred without incident.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas Day.

A 1992 presidential decree regulates the exercise of religious freedom. This decree maintains an official preference for the Catholic Church and the Reform Church of Equatorial Guinea. While the decree does not hinder the practice of other religious beliefs, its effects can be observed in many events; for example, Catholic Masses serve as a normal part of any major ceremonial function, such as the October 12 National Day. In addition, Catholic and Reform church officials are exempt from airport entry and exit taxes.

The decree regulates the registration of religious groups. To register, churches must submit a written application to the Ministry of Justice, Worship, and Penitentiary Institutions. The Director General in the Ministry oversees compliance with the decree and the registration process. This application was not required of the Catholic and Reform churches.

The application and approval process may take several years, but such delay appears to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency and not of policy designed to impede any religious group. Groups that provide beneficial social programs, such as health projects or schools, reportedly are approved more quickly. Enforcement of registration requirements is inconsistent. Unregistered groups that operate can be fined. Such fines are rarely applied, but the Government periodically announced over the radio that any unregistered church was subject to fines or closure and should register as soon as possible.

The fundamental law on religion states that each person is free to study his or her religion and should not be forced to study another faith, but the reality is somewhat more complicated: Religious study is optional in public schools and can be replaced by a course in social/civic education; however, the secular course could be failed, whereas it is virtually impossible to fail religion class. Catholic schools have long been the best available option for many students, and non-Catholics are expected to participate in daily Catholic lessons and prayers in those schools. In

recent years more Protestant churches have opened and grown; some of them, including Reform Church, evangelicals, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baptists operate their own primary and secondary schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Government continued to emphasize that the role of religion and of religious leaders is purely spiritual and discouraged the clergy's political criticism of the Government.

Some non-Catholic pastors who also worked for the Government as civil servants continued to report that their supervisors strongly encouraged participation in religious activities related to their government positions, including attending religious events such as Catholic Masses.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who were abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

ERITREA

The Constitution, ratified by the National Assembly in 1997, provides for religious freedom; however, the Government has yet to implement the Constitution.

Although the Government requires religious groups to register, since 2002 it has not approved any registrations beyond the country's four principal religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Government's record on religious freedom remained poor. The Government continued to harass and detain thousands of members of unapproved religious groups and retained substantial control over the four approved religious groups. The Government failed to approve religious groups that fulfilled the registration requirements and arrested persons during religious gatherings. The Government held religious prisoners in harsh conditions for long periods and without due process. There continued to be reports of forced recantations of faith and torture of religious detainees.

Citizens generally were tolerant of one another in the practice of their religion, with the exception of societal attitudes toward Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal groups. Some individuals viewed failure to perform the required military service as a sign of disloyalty and encouraged harassment of religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

The U.S. Government makes regular efforts to discuss religious freedom with the Government. Despite repeated attempts, government authorities responsible for religious affairs did not grant U.S. embassy officials opportunities to specifically discuss instances of religious freedom abuse. On January 16, 2009, the U.S. Secretary of State re-designated the country a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 48,489 square miles and a population of 5.5 million. Although reliable statistics are not available, it is estimated that 50 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 30 percent is Orthodox Christian, and 13 percent is Roman Catholic. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists,

Hindus, and Baha'is. Approximately 2 percent of the population practices indigenous religious beliefs. The population is predominantly Muslim in the eastern and western lowlands and predominantly Christian in the highlands. Religious participation is high among all ethnic groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides the freedom to practice any religion; however, the Government has yet to implement the Constitution since its ratification in 1997.

The Government officially recognizes four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. The Government has not approved the registrations of the Meherte Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Faith Mission Church, and the Baha'i Faith, despite their being fully compliant with the registration requirements since 2002. Those registrations require only the president's signature for full approval.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Islamic New Year, Epiphany, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Good Friday, Easter, Meskel, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Government bans religious organizations from involvement in politics and restricts the right of religious media to comment on political matters.

The law does not provide for conscientious objection to military service. A presidential decree declared that Jehovah's Witnesses had "forsaken their nationality" because they refuse to vote or perform required military service. This decree resulted in economic, employment, and travel difficulties for many members of the group, especially civil servants and merchants. In addition, some Muslims objected to universal national service based on the requirement that Muslim women must perform military duty.

The Government holds individuals jailed for their religious affiliation at various locations, including facilities administered by the military, such as Mai Serwa, Sawa, and Gelalo, as well as police stations in the capital and other cities. During the reporting period, the Government reportedly built a new camp in the desert town of Meiter specifically for religious detainees. Often, detainees are not

formally charged, accorded due process, or allowed access to their families. While many are ostensibly jailed for evasion of conscription, significant numbers are held solely for their religious beliefs. Detainees often are held in harsh conditions, such as underground or in shipping containers that are exposed to extreme temperature fluctuations. Many detainees are required to recant their religious beliefs as a precondition of release.

Religious groups must receive authorization from the Office of Religious Affairs to print and distribute documents. The Office of Religious Affairs routinely approves requests from approved religious organizations; however, unregistered churches occasionally are unable to obtain authorization to print materials for distribution within their congregations.

Religious groups require the approval of the Government to conduct religious services or other activities. The Office of Religious Affairs reviews applications. Registration requirements include a description of the history of the religious group in the country, an explanation of the uniqueness or benefit the group offers compared with other religious groups already present, names and personal information of religious leaders, detailed information on assets and property the group owns, conformity to "local culture," and sources of funding from abroad. Complete registrations require the President's signature.

Religious organizations must obtain government approval to build facilities for worship. A government proclamation outlines rules governing relations between religious organizations and foreign sponsors.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's record on religious freedom remained poor. The Government continued to harass and detain members of unapproved religious groups and retained significant control over the four approved religious groups.

The Government forbids what it deems to be radical forms of Islam and severely restricts numerous small Protestant churches, Baha'is, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Following a 2002 government decree that all religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, religious facilities that did not belong to the four officially recognized religious groups were forced to close. Some local authorities allowed unregistered groups to worship in homes or rented spaces, whereas others did not allow such groups to meet at all. The Government continued to disrupt

home-based worship and arrested those who hosted home prayer meetings, particularly if the gatherings consisted of more than five persons.

During the reporting period, authorities shut down at least one Seventh-day Adventist church in Asmara.

By December 2008 the Government evicted the remaining foreign missionaries by either refusing to renew their work permits or simply ordering them to leave; the policy had been ongoing for years. During the reporting period, reportedly more than 18 Italian monks and several Catholic nuns were asked to leave. Retired missionaries and representatives of the religious groups awaiting registration approval remained in-country but kept an extremely low profile for fear of abuse of their congregations.

The government-controlled media continued to characterize evangelical religious groups as imperialistic entities that promoted religious intolerance among citizens. In February 2008 the Government distributed a notice discouraging neighborhoods from allowing unapproved religious groups to use public burial grounds. Government officials routinely denied exit visas to persons who admitted affiliation with an unapproved religious group.

Military personnel were sometimes allowed to possess certain religious books to pray privately. This practice continued to be inconsistently applied. There were reports from Christian members of the military that Bibles were confiscated and sometimes burned.

The Government continued its involvement in the affairs of the four approved religious groups and required them to provide a list of religious leaders for enrollment in military/national service. The Government maintained control over the operations of the Eritrean Orthodox Church; a government-appointed lay administrator managed church operations and controlled all church donations. The Government continued to provide the Catholic Church with limited duration national service exemption cards for all religious workers and seminarians.

There continued to be reports that the Government seized religious property during the reporting period. In June 2008 the military expropriated property of the Catholic Church in Asmara.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities regularly harassed, arrested, and detained members of various religious groups. The Government closely monitored the activities and movements of unregistered religious groups and members, including nonreligious social functions attended by members. Persons arrested were often detained for extended periods without due process.

During the reporting period, there were reliable reports that authorities detained several hundred members of unregistered religious groups without charges. Some were released after detentions of several days or less, while others spent longer periods in confinement without charge and without access to legal counsel. Government restrictions made it difficult to determine the precise number of religious prisoners at any one time, and releases sometimes went unreported; however, the number of long-term religious prisoners continued to grow. At the end of the reporting period, reports indicated there were more than 3,000 Christians from unregistered groups detained in prison. These reports included nearly 40 leaders and pastors of Pentecostal churches in detention, some for more than three years without due process.

It is unknown how many of the 300 individuals detained during the previous reporting period remained incarcerated. Many of them were held in military prisons for not having performed required national military service but most for simply belonging to unregistered religious groups. Many were held for not belonging to any specific religious group and were told they would be released after joining one of the four approved religious groups. Several pastors and dozens of women were among those imprisoned. Many refused to recant their faith and continued to be detained in civilian and military detention facilities across the country; however, some were released after recanting their faith. There were reports that some religious prisoners died due to lack of medical treatment.

During the reporting period, the Government reportedly built a new camp in the desert town of Meiter specifically for religious detainees. The prison is isolated and does not allow visitors. The prison reportedly holds 150 to 200 prisoners, all held either for belonging to an unapproved religious group or for not belonging to a specific religious group.

There were numerous reports during the reporting period of government officials breaking into the houses of evangelicals and confiscating valuables.

On June 28, 2009, police arrested 22 Jehovah's Witnesses as they met for worship in Asmara. Most of the arrested were wives or daughters of previously arrested

men, leaving entire households imprisoned in some instances. Those arrested remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

In May 2009 the Government transferred dozens of prisoners, including Jehovah's Witnesses and members of evangelical religious groups, from police stations in Asmara to the Meiter detention center. In January 2009 two religious detainees reportedly died at Meiter from a combination of physical abuse and denial of medical treatment.

In April 2009 security officials searched two residences of Jehovah's Witnesses. They reportedly assaulted a young woman at each house, removing one from the home for further interrogation. The Government also reportedly threatened to arrest prisoners' families to compel testimony against other Jehovah's Witnesses.

On January 11, 2009, police arrested 15 members of the Kalet Hiwot Church in the city of Keren. In addition, 34 members of the same group were arrested in November 2008.

In January 2009 the Government reportedly carried out countrywide arrests of influential Muslims, describing the 60 Muslims arrested as "radical Islamists." In May 2009 authorities released 24 of them with a warning to keep their beards shaven and not to engage in "radical" activities. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not pressed charges against those who remained in prison nor did it produce any evidence of criminal activities.

In early 2009 the Government began confiscating vehicles marked with license plates designated for religious groups. The mass confiscation severely limited the abilities of the religious groups to perform daily tasks. Although the Government released some of the vehicles, many remained impounded with no explanation.

According to Open Doors USA, a U.S.-based Christian organization, in December 2008 authorities arrested at least 49 leaders of unregistered churches in Asmara.

In December 2008 authorities arrested a prominent professional associated with an evangelical church. Upon his release in March 2009, government officials reportedly warned him to cease his religious practices and become Orthodox.

In December 2008 the Government arrested more than 17 leaders of "noncompliant" religious groups, including a prominent doctor.

In November 2008 credible reports stated the Government arrested more than 110 evangelical Christians, including members of the Kalet Hiwot Church, the Full Gospel Church, and the Church of the Living God.

The Government continued to punish some students at military and private boarding schools for possessing Bibles. In October 2008 government authorities reportedly confiscated and burned more than 1,500 Bibles from incoming military trainees. Those who protested the burning were allegedly locked in metal shipping containers.

The Government maintained close financial ties with the Eritrean Orthodox Church in Kenya, which reported that planted agents stole church funds. On September 13, 2008, after a church official began to investigate the church's finances, Eritrean government officials in Nairobi assaulted the church official at his residence and stole \$2,570 (180,000 Kenyan shillings). These officials later shut down the church, preventing its public use.

On July 13, 2008, a woman detained for her religious affiliation died in the Wi'a Military Camp. Authorities reportedly refused to provide her with malaria medication. According to Compass Direct, a U.S.-based Christian news service, two others detained for religious reasons died of untreated malaria in June and October 2008.

On July 8, 2008, authorities in Asmara reportedly began arresting Jehovah's Witnesses, primarily men older than 50, at their residences and workplaces.

In June 2008 Compass Direct reported that plainclothes police arrested two Christians in Massawa for proselytizing.

The Government continued to detain, in Adi Abeto military prison, 28 of the 34 evangelical Christians arrested in May 2008 in Keren during a house raid.

The Government continued to detain, in the Wi'a Military Camp, 25 Protestant Christians arrested in May 2008 in Asmara.

In February 2008 a prominent Muslim leader reportedly died in prison after being held for two years. There were reports the Government continued to detain 180 Muslims who refused to honor the presence of the mufti appointed by the Government in 1993.

The Government continued to detain 28 of the 38 members of the Jehovah's Witnesses who were arrested in February 2008.

In February 2008 authorities released 35 Christians in Massawa after imprisoning them for six weeks.

In early 2008 authorities fired a teacher of the Jehovah's Witnesses faith for refusing to perform military service.

The Government continued to detain, in the Wi'a Military Camp, the 35 men, women, and children who belonged to the unapproved Faith Missions Church and who were arrested on Christmas Eve 2007.

The Government continued to detain the pastor of the Kalet Hiwot Church who was arrested in the Dekemhare region in October 2007. In late May and early June 2007 authorities detained the pastor and 20 members of his congregation.

The whereabouts of a priest arrested in October 2007 during an approved Bible study class at the Orthodox Church remained unknown during the reporting period.

In October 2007 authorities detained 45 members of a nonregistered, unapproved Christian church and beat the church leader severely.

In October 2007 a prominent evangelical singer was granted asylum in Denmark. The Government had released the woman for medical treatment for injuries sustained from severe beatings during two years in harsh detention conditions.

In September 2007 a 33-year-old woman, arrested at a church service of an unregistered denomination and imprisoned for 18 months, died in the Wi'a Military Training Center, reportedly after officials tortured her for refusing to recant her faith.

In July 2007 police invaded a home-based church service and detained five individuals.

In April 2007 nearly 80 members of an unregistered religious group attending a worship service were arrested and detained for one month despite having received authorization from the Office of Religious Affairs to hold the service.

In February 2007 there were credible reports another member of an unregistered religious group died at the Adi Nefase Military Confinement facility near Assab after enduring torture and illness.

In February 2007 police arrested 10 members of an unregistered church at a party following a wedding. These members were later released on \$10,000 (150,000 Nakfa) bail after promising not to practice their religion.

In January 2007 police arrested eight members of the Medhane Alem congregation of the Orthodox Christian Church. They were employees of various government ministries and arrested while at work.

The Government continued to detain the pastor of an unregistered church who was arrested in Asmara in January 2007.

Patriarch Abune Antonios, deposed from the Eritrean Orthodox Church in 2005 by the government-controlled synod, remained under house arrest, with few visitors allowed and no medical treatment. During the reporting period, the patriarch's health continued to deteriorate. In January 2007 there were credible reports that government officials raided his home and removed all his patriarchal vestments and personal religious items.

During November 2006 the Government undertook a large-scale campaign to arrest members of unregistered religious groups in the Mendefera region, reportedly detaining more than 150 Protestants from the Church of Living God, Kalet Hiwot, and other churches.

In October 2006 there were credible reports that two members of an unregistered church died from injuries in a military camp in Adi Quala after being severely beaten and tortured.

In October 2006 police arrested 12 members of an unregistered church at a private home in Asmara. Two of the individuals reportedly died shortly after the arrests after being tortured and severely beaten.

In August 2006 police arrested 29 members of unregistered churches during raids on home prayer meetings in Asmara, Keren, and Massawa.

In August 2006 some evangelical Christian students enrolled at the Mai Nefhi boarding school were released from detention, but only after they signed

documents recanting their faith. The released students were prevented from registering for school.

In conducting searches for national military service evaders, security forces continued to target gatherings of unregistered religious groups more frequently than those of other social and religious organizations.

Although members of several religious groups were imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in required national military service, the Government singled out Jehovah's Witnesses to receive harsher treatment than that given to followers of other religious groups for similar actions. (Jehovah's Witnesses are normally willing to perform nonmilitary national service). At least three Jehovah's Witnesses were detained for 15 years, reportedly for evading compulsory military service, far beyond the maximum legal penalty of two years for refusing to perform national service. In addition, Jehovah's Witnesses who did not participate in national military service were subject to dismissal from the civil service, revocation of business licenses, eviction from government-owned housing, and denial of passports, identity cards, and exit visas. They were also prohibited from having civil authorities legalize their marriages.

According to numerous sources, 63 Jehovah's Witnesses remained in detention without charges or trial during the reporting period. Although authorities detained Jehovah's Witnesses for allegedly failing to perform national military service, many of those detained were older than the cut-off age for national service eligibility (54 years for men and 47 years for women).

Forced Religious Conversion

There continued to be reports that police forced some adherents of unregistered religious groups held in detention to sign statements saying they abandoned their faith and to join the Orthodox Christian Church as a precondition of their release. These individuals typically faced imprisonment and/or severe beating until they agreed to sign the documents. Reports indicated these individuals were also monitored afterward to ensure they did not practice or proselytize for their unregistered religion. In some cases authorities demanded letters from priests of the Orthodox Church confirming that the individuals returned to the Orthodox Church. Similarly, police forced individuals who chose not to identify with a specific religious group, approved or otherwise, to choose an approved religious group or face continued detention.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Citizens generally accepted religious pluralism. Christians and Muslims in Asmara often celebrated their holidays jointly.

Jehovah's Witnesses, however, faced societal discrimination because of their refusal to participate in the 1993 independence referendum and their refusal to perform national military service. There was also some prejudice against other unregistered religious groups. Some persons reportedly cooperated with government authorities by reporting on, and harassing, members of those groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government makes regular efforts to discuss religious freedom with the Government. Despite repeated attempts, government authorities responsible for religious affairs did not grant U.S. embassy officials opportunities to specifically discuss instances of religious freedom abuse.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officers raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups in prior reporting periods with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

In September 2004 the U.S. Secretary of State first designated Eritrea as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On January 16, 2009, the U.S. Secretary of State re-designated the country a CPC. As the action under the IRFA, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

ESTONIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.34 million (including 68.7 percent ethnic Estonian, 25.6 percent Russian, 2 percent Ukrainian, 1.2 percent Belarusian, and 0.8 percent Finnish). Less than one-third of the population are members of Christian congregations. According to statistics provided by congregations, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church has 165 congregations with an estimated 180,000 members. The Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), has 30 congregations with approximately 200,000 members, and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) has 64 congregations with an estimated 27,000 members. Groups that each constitute fewer than 5 percent of the population include Roman Catholics, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Old Believers, Methodists, and other religious groups. There is a Jewish community of approximately 2,500 members in Tallinn, a community center, day school, museum, and a synagogue. There are also small communities of Muslims, Buddhists, and other religious groups. Only 14 percent of persons polled answered positively to the question, "Is religion an important part of your daily life?" according to a Gallop poll released in February 2009.

The ethnic Estonian majority is mainly Lutheran, while most religious adherents among the Russian-speaking population, who mainly reside in the capital or the northeastern part of the country, are Orthodox.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution states that there is no state church.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, and Christmas.

The Churches and Congregations Act and the Non-Profit Associations and Unions Act regulate the activities of religious associations. The statutes of churches, congregations, and unions of congregations are registered at the city courts.

The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that the commanding officer of each military unit shall guarantee defense force members the opportunity to practice their religion. Chaplain services extend to service members of all religious groups. The Act also decrees that prison directors shall ensure inmates the opportunity to practice their religious beliefs. Defense force members and prisoners exercised this right in practice.

Four police chaplains and a chief police chaplain provided religious services to police officers and police employees during the reporting period.

A church, congregation, or association of congregations must have a management board. Citizens and legal residents may be members of a management board. In order to formally register with the city court, the management board of a religious association submits an application signed by all members of the board. A congregation must have at least 12 adult members. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, a copy of statutes, and a notarized copy of signatures of the board members serve as supporting documents for the registration application.

A program of basic ecumenical religious instruction is available in public schools. A school must offer religious studies at the primary or secondary level if at least 15 students request it. Comparative religious studies are available in public and private schools on an elective basis.

The Government took steps to promote antibias and tolerance education. Since 2003 the Government has observed January 27 as the annual Holocaust and Other

Crimes against Humanity Victims' Memorial Day. In December 2007 the country became a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

In 2007 a *Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust*, compiled by the Estonian History Teachers' Association in cooperation with Living History Forum (Sweden) and cofinanced by the Government, was made available to teachers. The guide provides resources to assist in designing a program for classrooms to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day and offers additional materials for Holocaust lessons in history classes. These teaching materials include a compact disc and a digital video disc.

The International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, established by President Meri in 1998 to investigate issues related to the German and Soviet occupations of the country, finished its work on December 9, 2008.

The property restitution process, by which the Government transferred religious properties back to religious associations, was carried out under the 1991 Principles of the Ownership Reform Act. The process has largely been completed. By the end of the reporting period, most Orthodox Church properties, including those in use by the EOCMP, were either under the legal control of congregations, were owned by the state, or were the property of local municipalities. The Government previously had transferred 17 properties to the EOCMP. During the reporting period, the state transferred three properties to the EOCMP; one property remained to be transferred.

According to local Jewish leaders, property restitution was not an issue for the community, since most prewar religious buildings were rented, not owned.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Although the majority of citizens are traditionally Lutheran, ecumenical services on national days, Christian holy days, or at public events were common. There is a deep-seated tradition of tolerance of other denominations and religious groups.

During the reporting period, there were no reported acts of anti-Semitism.

On December 9, 2008, vandals damaged 44 gravestones and crosses in the old Haapsalu cemetery, including four crosses which were under protection as historic memorials. The police started criminal proceedings against two suspects in December 2008. The outcome of the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In June 2008 the Tartu Rural Court sentenced three youths who had vandalized dozens of graves in a Tartu cemetery in the summer of 2007 to hundreds of hours of community work.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officials of the U.S. Embassy met with the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, nongovernmental organizations, and a wide range of figures in religious circles. During the reporting period, embassy officials continued to engage the Government and nongovernmental actors to promote dialogue and education on Holocaust issues in the country.

The U.S. Government funded a travel grant for two history and civics teachers to attend a program at the South Carolina Council on the Holocaust at Columbia College from July 11 to 18, 2008.

ETHIOPIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Localized tensions between Muslim and Christian communities resulted in some violent episodes. Several civic and government programs attempted to address sectarian violence.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government promotes religious pluralism through a variety of outreach efforts.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 472,000 square miles and a population of 77 million. According to the 2007 census, 44 percent of the population belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), which is predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara.

Thirty-four percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, of which the majority is Sufi. Islam is most prevalent in the east, particularly in the Somali and Afar regions, as well as in many parts of Oromiya. There is a growing presence of conservative/orthodox Muslims, but they remain a tiny fraction of the Muslim population.

Christian evangelical and Pentecostal groups constitute 19 percent of the population. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus and Kale Hiwot are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPR); western and central Oromiya; and in urban areas. In Gambella region, Mekane Yesus followers represent 60 percent of the population. The Evangelical Church Fellowship claims 28 denominations under its religious umbrella throughout the country.

There are small numbers of Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), animists, and practitioners of indigenous religions.

The Government of Israel finalized immigration of the remaining Falash Mura community in August 2008. Many additional individuals claiming to be Falash Mura were also seeking to immigrate to Israel. The Government was screening remaining applicants individually at the end of the reporting period.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution requires the separation of state and religion; the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

Under a new press law adopted on December 4, 2008, it is a crime to incite one religious group against another. The law also allows defamation claims involving religious leaders to be prosecuted as criminal cases.

The Government observes both Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays and mandates a two-hour lunch break on Fridays for Muslim prayers. Official holidays include Epiphany, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Good Friday, Easter, Meskel, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas.

The Government prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion. The Government bans Waka-Feta, a traditional animist Oromo religious group, because of suspicion that the group's leaders have close links to the banned Oromo Liberation Front.

The Government requires religious groups to register in order to gain legal standing; without legal standing, a group cannot open a bank account or fully participate in a court proceeding. The Charities and Societies Law (CSO Law), adopted on February 13, 2009, established new registration requirements for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) but spared many religious groups the rigorous government scrutiny they endured in the past. However, religious

organizations that undertake development activities must register their development wings separately as NGOs and follow the strict new guidelines of the CSO Law, including a 10 percent limit on their foreign funding sources if they are to operate in certain rights-based fields.

Religious organizations, like NGOs, must renew their registration with the Ministry of Justice every three years. The EOC and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) do not reregister and do not face government sanctions, prompting some religious groups to complain of a double standard.

Religious groups, like private individuals or businesses, must apply to regional and local governments for land allocation. Religious groups are given use of government land for churches, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries free of charge; however, religious schools and hospitals, regardless of length of operation, are subject to government closure and land forfeiture at any time. An interfaith effort to promote revision of the law for religious organizations to obtain duty-free status continued during the reporting period.

Minority religious groups occasionally complained of discrimination in the allocation of land for religious sites. Protestants reported inequities in treatment and access by local officials when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders felt disadvantaged in the allocation of land compared with the EOC and the EIASC. An official at the Ministry of Federal Affairs characterized the perceived inequities as a result of poor governance at the local level, zoning regulations, and the allocations' impact on existing communal use functions.

Local authorities in the northern town of Axum, a holy city for the EOC, continued to deny Muslim leaders' repeated requests to allocate any land for the construction of a mosque. Muslims have access to land to build homes and nonreligious buildings in Axum. Tigray and Amhara regional government officials also refused to grant land to Muslims to build mosques; the Federal Government did not overrule them. In Lalibela, another holy city for the EOC, the local administration did not allocate land to build mosques, but provided plots of land for Muslim cemeteries.

Various religious groups seek the return of property the Government confiscated from them between 1977 and 1991. In Addis Ababa and Oromiya, such buildings were returned under federal provisions; however, structures registered under regional statutes were not returned.

The Government does not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they are associated with the development wing of a religious organization registered with the Government. This policy was not consistently enforced for Muslims or Orthodox Christians.

The Government interprets the constitutional provision for separation of religion and state to mean that religious instruction is not permitted in schools, whether public or private. Schools owned and operated by Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical, and Muslim groups were not allowed to teach religion as a course of study. Churches are permitted to have Sunday schools; the Qur'an is taught at mosques; and public schools permit the formation of clubs, including those of a religious nature.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringed on this right. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On June 30, 2009, police in Dessie Town shot and killed two persons who were part of a crowd that was demonstrating after being forced to stop unlawful construction of a church. Muslims also claimed the construction site. Several persons were injured in the violence, and one woman died when she fell off a cliff.

On April 24, 2009, police broke up a demonstration by Addis Ababa University students, temporarily detaining 70 of them, who were asking the Government to respect the right of Muslims to wear a hijab and pray on the university campus.

On December 1, 2008, police shot and injured three persons near a church in Arba-Minch town in Gamo Gofa Zone in an attempt to disperse a crowd following a disagreement between Orthodox priests.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On February 16-17 and April 23-24, 2009, the Ministry of Federal Affairs held forums in each regional state, which included representatives from local government, security bureaus, and police commissioners, to build interreligious understanding and resolve sectarian conflicts.

In July 2008 the government-supported NGO Interfaith Peace-Building Initiative established a National Inter-Faith Peace Council to promote a culture of peace, improve interfaith cooperation, establish trust and good relationships among religious groups, and help prevent future conflict.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In most regions, Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respected each other's religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas. However, there were some highly publicized religious conflicts that heightened tensions and precipitated government intervention. Additional reports of physical and verbal harassment aimed at religious officials and church members led victims to seek protection from local authorities.

The EIASC continued to express concern over the increasing influence of some Saudi-funded entities within the Muslim community, which the EIASC blamed for exacerbating tensions between Christians and Muslims. There was tension between the traditional Sufi Muslim majority and Muslims who derived support in part from Saudi Arabian NGOs.

In March 2009 the EIASC banned Muslim groups from holding meetings and activities without prior permission from the council.

On January 25, 2009, one policeman was killed and eight civilians injured in a religious conflict in Gonder City. The conflict reportedly began when Muslims began to build a mosque in a place where two Tabots traditionally are brought together for Timkat (Epiphany), an important Orthodox holiday. Police arrested 40 persons and continued to detain them at the end of the reporting period.

From January 8-10, 2009, a series of localized religious clashes in Dire Dawa resulted in one dead and 20 injured. In one neighborhood, Muslim youth, reportedly angry about Israeli attacks on Gaza, threw stones at Christian youth who were singing religious songs in the street during the EOC Christmas holiday.

Christian youth retaliated by throwing stones at Muslims until police intervened. These violent clashes spread from one neighborhood to another.

On November 6, 2008, officials arrested several members of a Muslim group known as Kawerj for planning and executing large-scale attacks against Christians in 2006 in the Illubabor, Jimma, and West Wellega zones of Oromiya State. As of the end of the reporting period, their status was not known.

On March 31, 2009, the Forum for Federalism and Democracy and the Addis Ababa Information and Public Relations Bureau held a panel discussion on religious equality and freedom in the Constitution in order to help prevent religious conflict.

In March 2009 the Addis Ababa city administration met with representatives from several religious groups to discuss ways to curb future religious conflict.

In February 2009 the Minister of Federal Affairs called on communities to reveal the identity of individuals or groups involved in attempts to incite religious conflicts.

In November 2008 local government officials in Seka Buyo mediated reconciliation efforts between Muslim and Christian leaders following an October 2007 attack on 25 Protestant families by Muslims.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Government promoted religious pluralism through a poster contest, sports programs, a "peace and unity" concert, and billboards depicting religious tolerance.

FIJI

The country's laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Prior to its abrogation in April 2009, the Constitution expressly provided for freedom of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. However, there was a decline in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report as a result of a nation-wide "Christian crusade," directed by the Police Commissioner, which all police officers and their families were required to attend, regardless of religion.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago of more than 300 islands with a total area of 7,050 square miles and a population of 827,000. Most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. Estimates of religious affiliation were as follows: 52 percent of the population is Christian, 30 percent Hindu, and 7 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination is the Methodist Church, which claims approximately 218,000 members. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also have significant followings. The Methodist Church is supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remains influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural areas. There is also a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religious affiliation runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constitute 57 percent of the population, are Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who account for 37 percent of the population, practice Hinduism, while 20 percent follow Islam. In addition, an estimated 6 percent of Indo-Fijians are Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese, Europeans, Rotumans, and other Pacific Islanders. Approximately 60 percent of the small Chinese community is Christian, and 4 percent adheres to Confucianism. The very small European community is predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintain a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

Numerous Christian missionary organizations are nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations, most notably the Methodist Church, have missionaries in the country. The missionaries operate numerous religious schools, including colleges, not subsidized by the Government.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Prior to its abrogation in April 2009, the Constitution provided for freedom of religion. Current laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or beliefs in worship, observance, practice, or teaching; however, this right is limited for police officers. There is no state religion. Religious groups are not required to register. The Government did not restrict foreign clergy, domestic or foreign missionary activity, or other activities of religious organizations.

The Government recognizes major holy days of the predominant religions as national holidays, including Easter, Christmas, Diwali, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the role of religion continued to be a political issue. Younger Methodist leaders have in recent years moderated the expression of strong ethnic Fijian nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous church leadership.

Under the direct leadership of the Police Commissioner, the Fiji Police Force partnered with Souls to Jesus (commonly known as the New Methodists), a Christian group led by the Police Commissioner's younger brother, to host

evangelistic events at all police divisions and major police stations in the country in an effort to foster community policing and reduce crime. All officers and their families are required to attend the rallies, regardless of religion. In February 2009, local media covered a tirade by the commissioner directed against senior Indo-Fijian police officers during which he accused them of being liars and backstabbers. The commissioner told officers to support the Christian rallies or leave the police force. The incident was caught on camera and followed anonymous complaints to journalists from within the police force about Hindu and Muslim police officers and their families being compelled to attend Christian rallies. There were reports of Hindu and Muslim police officers joining the commissioner's church for fear of being denied promotions or losing their jobs. The Police Force asserted the Christian crusades were highly successful, resulting in a 50 percent decrease in crime, and would continue.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There was some concern the religious crusade instituted by the Police Commissioner resulted in coercion within the police force to convert to Christianity.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. According to police statistics, reported incidents of sacrilege decreased from 39 in 2006 to 22 in 2007. Of the 21 reports of robbery and/or desecration of places of worship in 2007, 12 involved Christian churches, seven involved Hindu temples, and two involved mosques. Police surmised that many incidents had more to do with theft than with religious intolerance.

Several Hindu temples were attacked during the reporting period. In August 2008, a private temple in Ba was reportedly destroyed by arsonists. Following a string of temple desecrations in October, Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama ordered a special investigation. Bainimarama stated that ending racism against Indo-Fijians was a priority for his administration.

There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream seeking to establish congregations in some villages and outer islands.

In a few cases, local traditional leaders prevented groups from proselytizing or holding meetings.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy disseminated materials related to political and religious freedom across a wide spectrum of society.

FINLAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. According to law, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) and the Orthodox Church are the established state churches.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 130,127 square miles and a population of 5.3 million. Approximately 82 percent of the population belongs to the ELC and 1 percent to the Orthodox Church. There are seven Roman Catholic congregations with an estimated 9,000 registered members, and two Jewish congregations with approximately 1,500 members. Pentecostal church communities registered as associations have an estimated 45,000 members. Only a fraction of Pentecostal churches are registered, however, and the actual number of Pentecostal worshippers is considerably higher.

There are approximately 40,000 Muslims, compared with an estimated 1,000 in 1990. Their numbers continued to grow due to immigration and a high birthrate. Of these, approximately 30,000 are Sunni and up to 10,000 are Shiite. The largest group is Somali; there are also communities of North Africans, Bosnians, peninsula Arabs, Tartars, Turks, and Iraqis. There are four major Muslim organizations: the Muslim Community in Finland, the Tampere Muslim Community, Shi'a Muslims, and the Multicultural Dawa Center of Islam.

Membership in nonstate religious groups totals approximately 61,000. An estimated 16 percent of the population does not belong to any religious group.

The rapid modernization of society has modified attitudes toward religion. Society has become more secular, political and social philosophy has diverged from religious philosophy, and religious belief has largely become a private matter. Research indicates, however, that most citizens still consider religion and spirituality very significant in their lives. Despite the small number of persons who attend church services regularly, citizens have a high regard for the church and its activities, consider their membership important, and still value church ceremonies. Most citizens are baptized and married in the church, confirmation classes are common, and most citizens choose religious burial services.

Over the past several decades, as many as 450,000 persons have left the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). An estimated 50,000 members left the ELC during the reporting period, higher than during the previous year, while approximately 10,000 joined. Separation from the Church has risen markedly since implementation of the Religious Freedom Act of 2003, which made separation much easier. Since then, separations have increased from approximately 16,000 to 50,000 a year. The October 2008 "youth barometer" poll found that 73 percent of citizens ages 15 to 29 felt no attachment to a religious community. The figure in 2004 for the same poll was 63 percent.

Catholics, Muslims, and Jews, as well as "nontraditional" religious groups, freely professed and propagated their beliefs. Such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have been active for decades.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The law includes the right to profess and practice religion and to express personal belief. Everyone has the right to belong, or decline to belong, to a religious community. The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The religious affiliation of a child does not automatically follow that of a parent. Membership in or resignation from a religious community is always based on a separate expression of the will of the parents or guardians, such as baptism. The

denomination of any person older than 12 may be changed only with his or her consent.

All citizens who belong to either state church--the ELC or the Orthodox Church--pay a church tax set at 1 to 2 percent of income, varying by congregation, as part of their income tax. Those who do not want to pay the tax must separate from membership. These taxes help defray the cost of running the churches. The state churches record births, deaths, and marriages for members (state registrars do this for other persons).

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Second Day of Christmas.

The Religious Freedom Act of 2003 includes regulations on registered religious communities. To be recognized, a religious group must have at least twenty members, have as its purpose the public practice of religion, and be guided in its activities by a set of rules. The Government recognizes 53 religious groups.

The act allows persons to belong to more than one denomination; however, most religious communities do not allow their members to do so.

In 2008, for the first time, registered religious communities other than the ELC and the Orthodox Church also became eligible to apply for state funds. Legislation passed in late 2007 provides that communities with 200 or more members may receive a statutory subsidy from the annual government budget. Twenty-five communities with a total estimated membership of 64,400 qualified by the end of the reporting period. In 2008, 22 communities applied for state funds; a total of \$280,000 (€200,000) was allocated to 19 communities, \$6.82 (€4.87) per member. The 3 communities whose applications were declined each had fewer than 200 registered members.

All public schools provide religious and philosophical instruction; students may choose to study either subject. In certain Helsinki-area schools, Muslim students outnumber members of the country's second largest religious group, Orthodoxy. Countrywide, the number of Muslim students has increased by approximately 20 percent each year over the past three years. This trend was expected to continue based on current asylum and refugee trends.

In May 2009 ten conscientious objectors (COs) were in prison. Two possible scenarios may affect COs: (1) a conscript may go directly to the military but then refuse service, for which the Ministry of Defense sentences 7 to 12 persons annually, generally to imprisonment, or (2) a conscript alternatively may opt to go to the Ministry of Employment and Economic Development for alternative service; if the CO then decides not to comply or begins but then fails to continue alternative civilian service, he falls under civilian law, which parallels military law on this subject. The outcome is also generally imprisonment for the same term as for a military objector. The approximate number of these convictions was 40 in 2008.

COs serve prison terms of 181 days--the legal maximum, lowered from 197 days previously and equal to one-half the 362 days of alternative civilian service, which had been lowered from 395 days on January 1, 2008. Regular military service varies between 180 and 362 days. Some of those imprisoned stated that their objection to performing compulsory military or civilian service was based on religious conviction. Jehovah's Witnesses are specifically exempt from performing both military and alternative civilian service.

There was no evidence that the Government singled out individuals for prosecution because of their religious beliefs or membership in a religious minority.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports during the reporting period of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were no reports of anti-Semitic incidents.

Nontraditional religious groups generally were not subject to discrimination, despite the intolerant attitudes of some members of society.

Immigrants did not encounter difficulties in practicing their religious beliefs; however, they sometimes encountered discrimination and xenophobia.

Some citizens were not receptive to proselytizing by adherents of nontraditional religious groups, in part because they regarded religion as a private matter.

The dispute between the ELC leadership and those of its clergy who refused to cooperate with female ministers continued. As head of the ELC, the archbishop insisted that all clergy ordained by the Church must accept the rules adopted by the Church that permit women to be ordained and serve as ministers.

Programs available through the Ministries of Education and Labor focus on combating discrimination, including religious discrimination.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives periodically met with representatives of religious communities--both mainstream and nontraditional--to discuss religious freedom issues.

FRANCE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, discriminatory treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists remained a concern. Some religious groups voiced opposition to legislation passed in 2001 and 2004, which provides for the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and bans the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public school employees and students. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and state prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, but there continued to be concerns about the treatment of some minority religious groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. A 2004 law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students continued to be implemented during the reporting period. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-Ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES). Discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and other groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained a concern and may have contributed to acts of vandalism against these groups. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Anti-Semitic acts remained similar to 2007 levels (397 from 386 in 2007), according to the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CNCDH). There were 36 violent acts and 99 threats (down from 256 in 2007) directed against individuals of North African origin in 2008. Among the violent incidents, two were explicitly anti-Islamic in nature, targeting mosques. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to strongly criticize anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government provided increased security for Jewish institutions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles and a population of 64,100,000.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation.

According to the 2008 Guide of the Catholic Church in France, France is 65 percent Catholic, including those who never attend religious services. Of Catholics, only 5 percent go to church regularly.

There are an estimated five million to six million Muslims (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these are practicing vary widely. According to a January 17, 2008, survey in the Catholic daily newspaper *La Croix*, 39 percent of Muslims surveyed said they observed Islam's five prayers daily, an increase from 31 percent in 1994. Mosque attendance for Friday prayers rose to 23 percent, up from 16 percent in 1994, while Ramadan observance reached 70 percent compared to 60 percent in 1994.

Protestants make up 2.1 percent of the population, Jewish and Buddhist religious groups 1 percent each, and Sikhs less than 1 percent.

According to French daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, there were approximately 1.5 million Protestants in France in 2008.

According to *La Croix*, there are approximately 500,000 Buddhists in the country, making it the country's fourth-largest religion. This may underrepresent the actual number of adherents, as it is difficult to distinguish between practicing Buddhists and the much larger number of persons who characterize themselves as sympathetic to certain Buddhist principles. Scholars distinguish between "sympathizers" (approximately 5,000,000), "associates" (defined as having a certain degree of proximity to Buddhism and estimated to number between 100,000 and 150,000), and "practitioners" (approximately 12,000). The largest Buddhist meditation center in the West is in the region of Touraine, and two Tibetan monasteries in the Auvergne region have trained the largest number of Buddhist monks outside Asia, according to 2002 statistical data. In all, there are 300 Buddhist places of worship in the country.

The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000 (70 percent Sephardic and 30 percent Ashkenazi). According to press reports, at least 60 percent of Jews are not highly observant, celebrating at most only the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews--5 percent of all Jews in a country--are Orthodox. There are small Conservative and Reform congregations as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that 250,000 persons attend their services either regularly or periodically, although they estimate approximately 120,000 are observant which would make it the fifth-largest religion.

Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches.

Other religious groups include Evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches is growing (with as many as 400,000 adherents, according to January 2008 press reports), including African-style "prosperity" churches, especially in the suburbs of Paris, in large part because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to a recent study published by the French School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), there were 34,381 members of The Church of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons, at the end of 2007, 30 percent of whom are observant. The Church of Scientology has an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. A long history of conflict between religious groups and between the Church and the Republic led the state to break its ties to the Catholic Church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining a totally secular public sector. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and state, the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom, prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

Of the country's ten national holidays, five are Christian holy days: Easter, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day.

Religious organizations are not required to register but may apply for tax-exempt status or gain official recognition if they so wish. The Government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: *associations cultuelles* (or *paroissiales*--associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and *associations culturelles* (cultural associations, which are normally not exempt). Associations in either category are subject to certain management and financial

disclosure requirements. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. A cultural association may engage in profit-making activity. Although a cultural association is not exempt from taxes, it may receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations, such as schools. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories; the Mormons, for example, run strictly religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school under their cultural association.

Under the 1905 statute, religious groups must apply to the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and to receive tax-exempt status. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose. There is a process to appeal the initial decision of a prefecture. To qualify, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and approximately 30 of 1,050 Islamic associations have tax-exempt status. Approximately 100 Catholic associations are tax-exempt; a representative of the Ministry of Interior reports that the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately. More than 50 associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-exempt status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive; however, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

The 2001 About-Picard Law tightened restrictions on associations and provided for the dissolution of groups, including religious groups, under certain conditions. These include: endangering the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person; placing minors at mortal risk; violating another person's freedom, dignity, or identity; the illegal practice of medicine or pharmacology; false advertising; and fraud or falsification. In 2002 the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it, to no avail. Although the provisions allowing for the dissolution of groups have never been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time in 2004 against the leader of the

Neo Phare (New Lighthouse) group, Arnaud Mussy, whose announcement of the approaching apocalypse prompted a group member to commit suicide.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Protestant Reformed, and Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these groups. Adherents of these groups may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious organization in a system administered by the central Government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and state. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest mosque, the Paris Grand Mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from entry visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain longer than 90 days must obtain visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a *carte de séjour*--a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time--and must provide the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

Public schools are secular; in 2004 the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. The legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but facts about religions are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may homeschool children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. At the beginning of the 2008 academic year, public school cafeterias in Lyon serving 16,400 students began replacing beef with fish and eggs to satisfy the dietary requirements of certain religious groups. Lyon public officials, who characterized the decision as "an effort at consensus building aimed at respecting diversity," made the change after lengthy consultation with representatives of the major religious groups as well as prosecularism groups. The Government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations.

In 2004 the Government released the Rufin Report, which concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to democracy and that anti-Semitic acts were carried out not only by elements of the extreme right and Muslim youth of North African descent but also by "disaffected individuals" with anti-Semitic obsessions. Additionally, the report concluded that the press law of 1881, designed to guarantee freedom of the press, was too unwieldy to adequately address the issues of racism and anti-Semitism. It recommended removing from the press law all injunctions against incitement to racism and anti-Semitism and putting them into a new law written specifically to address these issues. The Rufin Report also called for countering intolerance in primary schools; educating new immigrants about the fight against racism and anti-Semitism; and creating an observation system to monitor racist and anti-Semitic websites and to work closely with authorities to prosecute offenders.

Since taking office in May 2007, President Sarkozy persistently pursued reform of the official policy of secularism, arguing for a wider public role for religion in society. He addressed religion in several major speeches: in March 2009 at an event sponsored by the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF); to religious leaders in France from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist faiths in January 2009; and during the Pope's visit in September 2008.

On March 2, 2009, President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon were among approximately 850 high-profile guests from across the political and social spectrum at an annual dinner hosted by the CRIF. After participating in the Gaza donors' conference in Sharm el-Sheikh earlier in the day, President Sarkozy, the guest of honor, said in remarks that he "absolutely" wanted to be at the CRIF event in order to show "support and friendship" to the Jewish community. PM Fillon also gave a speech in which he emphasized his determination to fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. PM Fillon announced the appointment of Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin to a special anti-Semitism post as Vice President of the National Information and Liberties Commission (CNIL) dedicated to monitoring Internet attacks and abuses in this area.

On January 12, 2009, President Sarkozy, in the wake of increased domestic violence in reaction to the Gaza crisis, used his annual New Year's meeting with top French religious figures to condemn "with the greatest force the unacceptable violence" against individuals, property, and religious buildings. Sarkozy called for peace and social cohesion among religions and a deepening of interreligious dialogue.

On September 12, 2008, President Sarkozy gave a speech alongside the Pope at the Elysée Palace, advocating a "positive secularism" that is respectful of its Christian roots. Sarkozy also reiterated government action to protect freedom of religion, to work to end attacks against worshippers and places of worship, and to continue interreligious dialogue with members from all faiths in the country. The speech was met with a wave of criticism from politicians and pundits. Francois Bayrou, head of the Democratic Movement (MoDem) Party, blasted the president in a full-page interview in the newspaper *Journal du Dimanche* on September 14 for mixing religion and politics, "which is good neither for the republic nor for religion." Manuel Valls, a Socialist Party deputy who supports reforming the party along social democratic lines, castigated President Sarkozy in the same newspaper for "distorting the office of the presidency" by pushing religion to the fore in the public sphere.

While Interior Minister in 2005, Sarkozy established a commission led by law professor Jean-Pierre Machelon that recommended reforming the 1905 law separating church and state to allow local communities to finance the construction of places of worship. The Machelon Report also proposed implementing a less rigid set of criteria for a religious group to have the legal status of an association of worship. The proposed reform would allow associations of worship to integrate activities such as social events and book selling, thereby "enlarging the social presence" of such groups. The report proposals support Sarkozy's assertion in 2002 that the state should encourage a public form of Islam, moderated by social recognition and open practice. On January 24, 2008, Interior Minister Alliot-Marie, who is charged with managing state relations with the country's religious communities, dismissed much of the uproar surrounding President Sarkozy's proreligion comments and reiterated that the Government was only considering reforms that would modernize, not abolish, the 1905 secularism law. Alliot-Marie cited the recommendations of the Machelon Report.

The Government made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. It is illegal to deny crimes against humanity. The Gayssot Act criminalizes questioning the existence of the category of crimes against humanity defined in the London Charter of 1945. The Government combats racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Mosques, the Protestant Federation, and the Conference of Bishops, publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003 a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-

Semitic, or xenophobic" nature, and in 2004 legislation further increased punishment for "hate" crimes. The Government regularly applies these laws in prosecuting anti-Semitic crimes.

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic community is represented by the Council of Bishops. The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises 16 churches and 60 associations, and serves as the interlocutor with the Government. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community.

On January 12, 2009, in the context of the Gaza crisis, State Secretary for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara called a meeting of Muslim and antiracism civic organizations involved in disadvantaged communities to urge them to combat any "outbreak of anti-Semitism." The groups drafted a common statement called "Living Together" that was posted on the Internet. On the same day, the Grand Mosque in Paris issued a statement calling for Muslim communities in France to remain calm while also condemning violence directed at Jewish sites.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes Jewish worship and cultural associations from the entire country. It acts as a liaison with the Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943 Jewish members of the Resistance formed the CRIF. The CRIF's mission is to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The National Council of the Muslim Faith and 25 affiliated regional councils serve as interlocutors for the Muslim community with local and national officials on such civil-religious issues as mosque construction, provision of religious leaders for prisons and the military, and certification of halal butchers. In 2004 then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of the Foundation for Islam to assist in the funding of mosques, provide a transparent vehicle for individual and foreign donations, and assist in training foreign imams in the country's language, history, and civics.

On November 17, 2008, an appeals court in Douai in northern France overturned a lower court's ruling that annulled the marriage of a Muslim couple because the bride lied about her virginity. Holding that virginity was not a legal precondition for the marriage, the appeals court decision added that the wife's misrepresentation was not enough to justify an annulment. The original decision, announced on

April 1, 2008, prompted sharp reactions in political and human rights circles about the role of Islam in the courts. After the November 17 ruling, Lille mayor Martine Aubry issued a statement saying she was delighted with the ruling, emphasizing that it was consistent with "European conventions for human rights and [was] respectful of the republic's values." The feminist movement *Neither Whores nor Submissives*, founded by State Secretary for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara, issued a statement expressing "relief" in response to the decision.

New government-funded construction of mosques was expected to increase in future years in the cities of Marseille, Strasbourg, Nantes, Paris, Tours, Saint-Denis, and Cergy-Pontoise. According to Ministry of Interior 2008 estimates, there are 1,920 places of Muslim worship in France, 370 of which are in Paris, for the country's estimated 5 five million Muslims.

After much negotiation dating back to 2006, a new mosque that will accommodate 2,500 worshippers was slated to begin construction in Marseille in September 2009. The Grand Mosque of Marseille, which is estimated to cost \$13.5 million (€10 million) with a scheduled completion date of 2011, will feature a library, a bookstore, a Qur'anic school, and restaurant open to the public. The project was initially stalled by a legislative disagreement over whether the decision to facilitate building the mosque would have contravened the 1905 law separating church and state.

On December 3, 2008, the Grand Mosque of Creteil (Val-de-Mame) was inaugurated five years after the project was approved. The mayor of Creteil, Laurent Cathala, said the project overcame the complex issue of public financing of religious buildings.

In 2004 Parliament passed a law authorizing the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons."

MIVILUDES is charged by the Government with observing and analyzing "sect" or "cult" movements that constitute a threat to public order or that violate law, coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by "cults," informing the public about potential risks, and helping victims to receive aid. MIVILUDES was created by presidential decree in 2002 and exists as an independent body in which the Prime Minister appoints the director. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions. In its sixth annual report (covering 2008) to the Prime Minister's Office, published on

May 19, 2009, MIVILUDES researchers highlighted what they identified as several increasingly pervasive cult-related dangers and reaffirmed their commitment to protect the public from psychological manipulation masquerading as religion. The report indicated that the Government intends to implement greater operational control over sects through multidisciplinary teams led by the Ministry of Interior. The teams, due for activation in late 2009, would observe religious sects and take possible legal action when necessary based on MIVILUDES' recommendations. The report also devoted an entire chapter to cults' increasing efforts to project their influence internationally through the lobbying of and interaction with international forums including the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, specifically its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, under the guise of NGOs working to defend religious freedom.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, but the treatment of minority religious groups considered dangerous sects or cults remained an issue of concern.

On September 23, 2008, Prime Minister Fillon appointed Georges Fenech the new president of MIVILUDES, replacing Jean-Michel Roulet. Fenech, a former Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) deputy representing Rhône, is known for his opposition to Scientology, among other groups. As a judge from 1988 to 1995, Fenech conducted investigations into Scientology's activities that led to the conviction of several members for second-degree murder after the suicide of another Scientologist. Scientologist spokesperson Daniele Gounord condemned Fenech's selection as "scandalous." Legal counsel for the Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP), an association of minority religions and related organizations of which Scientology is a member, called Fenech's appointment "a backward step for religious freedom and tolerance in France." Before his appointment as president of MIVILUDES, Fenech was tasked by Prime Minister Fillon in April 2008 to research sectarian abuses and present a report to the Prime Minister. Fenech's report, "Justice Faced with Sectarian Abuses," was issued by the Prime Minister's Office in June 2008 and outlines 12 recommendations for strengthening judicial efforts to combat sectarian excesses, part of an effort to harmonize European Union rules in this area. CAP legal counsel took issue with the report, questioning Fenech's personal objectivity and neutrality on the issue of religious tolerance.

Legal counsel for CAP argued that more aggressive application of the About-Picard Law could empower groups hostile to minority religions to initiate criminal complaints against religious groups, to represent the complainants using their own attorneys, to appear as private civil parties and thereby to undertake unjustified attacks on religious minorities as government proxies. CAP legal counsel argued that according the status of "civil party" to what they deem a biased organization in the determination of a criminal case against minority religious groups would violate the impartiality of the tribunal. They also found fault with the law which endowed any association recognized as being of public utility and existing for at least five years with the right to act as a civil party in suits against groups for "psychological or physical subjection." Specifically, CAP legal counsel argued that granting this status implies a predetermination that negates the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

On June 15, 2009, the public prosecutor in a high profile fraud trial against seven of the Church of Scientology's top officials and two of its branches asked the Paris Correctional Court to designate Scientology a criminal enterprise that would result in an effective ban in the country, which could be followed by bans in other EU countries. Maud Coujard, the lead prosecutor in the case, recommended that fines of \$2.77 million (€2 million) and suspended multiyear jail terms be levied against the leaders, a Scientology center, and its French bookstores if convicted on charges of organized fraud and illegally practicing as pharmacists. The trial stems from a complaint made in 1998 by a woman who claimed Scientologists recruited her outside a Paris metro station and misled her into paying some \$30,000 for books and materials. A judicial decision was expected in the fall. Fenech noted that if the court upholds the prosecutor's recommendation, "it could be possible to also order dissolution of other structures of the [Scientology] movement in France."

The 2009 MIVILUDES report on dangerous "sects and cults" referred to Jehovah's Witnesses 13 times in connection with antisect associations in Europe. The Jehovah's Witnesses report that during the Europe one radio interview about the report's release, Amélie Cladière, the MIVILUDES General Secretary, "mischaracterized the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and insinuated sectarian practices." Jehovah's Witnesses report frequent denial of requests to visit fellow believers in prison to provide worship, literature, and programs of the sort granted to other religious groups that society views as mainstream.

On December 15, 2008, a legal challenge to the law banning the wearing of ostensible religious signs in public schools was filed by the United Sikhs lawyers

before the United Nations Human Rights Committee. A similar legal challenge was also filed by United Sikhs lawyers on May 30, 2008, before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Preceding these motions was a December 2007 French Conseil d'Etat ruling that upheld the legal ban on wearing of ostensible religious signs. These legal challenges by United Sikhs lawyers relate to the expulsion in 2004 of six Sikh boys for wearing the "keski" (an under-turban) to school. The Conseil d'Etat in its 2007 ruling maintained that the "keski" was not a discreet sign but an ostensible manifestation of religion, which is prohibited by law. The court concluded in the interest of secularism in public schools that the permanent expulsion of a student who does not conform to the legal ban on wearing of ostensible religious signs "does not lead to an excessive infringement on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." The United Sikhs and French Turban Action Committee had argued before the court that the expulsion had infringed upon articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provide for the freedom to manifest one's religion and the right not to be discriminated against, respectively. At the end of the reporting period, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and ECHR had not rendered a decision on the legal challenges.

On December 15, 2008, in addition to the motion filed above, United Sikhs lawyers also filed a legal challenge before the UN Human Rights Committee on behalf of Ranjit Singh and Shingara Singh regarding the Government's refusal to issue a resident card and passport because the plaintiffs refused to remove their turban for their identification photos. At the end of the reporting period, a decision had not been rendered in this case.

On November 27, 2008, Shingara Mann Singh from Sarcelles, who refused to remove his turban as required when taking photos to receive his driver's license, lost a legal challenge before the ECHR. ECHR judges ruled unanimously that French regulations prohibiting head coverings when posing for identification papers did not constitute interference within the right of the freedom of religion. The Court held that while Singh's religious rights might have been infringed upon, the Government justifiably banned wearing the turban specifically in the driver's license photo on the grounds that the turban covered the applicant's identifiable ears, posing a risk of fraud and falsification.

In December 2008 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, asked the Government to reexamine the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools. There were no reports that the Government reviewed the 2004 law during the reporting period. Jahangir has

repeatedly asked the Government to reconsider the law. For example, in 2007 she noted several areas of concern, particularly the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools, which may "protect the autonomy of minors who may be pressured or forced to wear a headscarf or other religious symbols" but also may serve to deny the rights of "minors who have freely chosen to wear a religious symbol to school as a part of their religious belief." She continued, "The stigmatization of the headscarf has provoked acts of religious intolerance when women wear it outside school."

In 1996 a parliamentary commission studying "cults" publicly released a report that identified 173 groups as "cults," including the Raelians, the Association of the Triumphant Vajra, the Order of the Solar Temple, Sukyo Mahikari, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Theological Institute of Nimes (an evangelical Christian Bible college), and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of some of the groups listed have alleged instances of intolerance because of the ensuing publicity. Minority religious groups indicated that the allegations in the report were unsubstantiated and often false, thereby adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved.

At the end of the reporting period, Catherine Picard, chairwoman of the National Union of Associations for the Protection of the Family and the Individual (UNADFI) was in the process of appealing a decision against her rendered by the Appeals Court of Rouen on July 18, 2007, for slandering the Jehovah's Witnesses. In its July 2007 decision, the Court fined Picard \$10,125 (€6,750) to be paid to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The ECHR had not ruled on the appeal of the Jehovah's Witnesses whose 2002 court ruling to pay taxes on donations received totaled more than the value of the group's assets. The Jehovah's Witnesses were appealing the Court of Cassation's first and only decision to tax donations received by a not-for-profit corporation. The case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Senior government officials, up to and including President Sarkozy, strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance, and extremism.

On June 7, 2009, the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, designated the Dalai Lama an Honorary Citizen of the city.

Twenty-five students attended the Catholic Institute's Master's-level degree program entitled "Religion, Secularism, and Inter-culturalism" training, including 10 foreign imams and 15 military chaplains. Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum for the training program that began in February 2008. The program addresses the fact that most of the approximately 1,200 imams preaching in the country come from overseas and do not speak French, hindering communication with their congregations and their understanding of local customs and laws. Initiated in collaboration with the Paris Mosque, the program, for which the Government provides 60 percent of funding, is intended to provide students, including future clerics, a broad understanding of French legal, historical, and social norms while avoiding theology per se. The goal is to develop an Islam within the country that will be of the country and foster integration. Theological instruction is left to the Paris mosque, which has administered a four-year imam training program since 1993. The students are primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. The training, which focuses on imams, has been well-received by the country's religious communities, including Muslims, and is open to high-level officials and clergy from all religions, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations.

On April 7, 2009, the Ministry of Interior confirmed the expulsion of an imam for making anti-Semitic remarks during the training offered by the Catholic Institute of Paris to future imams. Abdessamad Merimi, a Moroccan citizen who preached in the Paris suburb of Grigny, made anti-Semitic remarks on three occasions during a lecture on Judaism during the training. Fellow students, shocked by Merimi's remarks, immediately notified the director of the Institute.

On September 22, 2008, the criminal affairs director from the Ministry of Justice sent a request to public prosecutors to address an appraisal of antidiscrimination efforts in their areas. The request followed the July 2007 announcement by the Justice Ministry of the creation of 179 dedicated antidiscrimination posts to be located in district courts and staffed by a referring judge charged with managing local cases in close collaboration with civil society. Justice Minister Dati

announced her goal of staffing each of these posts with an attorney specially trained in handling cases involving racial or religious discrimination. The results of this request were to be released in the 2008 criminal policy report, which at the end of the reporting period had not been published.

On September 15, 2008, against a backdrop of rising crime in the 19 district, the police announced new initiatives to combat anti-Semitism and protect Jewish places of worship. After a meeting with Jewish groups, law enforcement officials announced the launch of a telephone hotline and e-mail address for reporting anti-Semitic acts.

At the end of the reporting period, the CNCDH report listed several new government antidiscrimination initiatives required for law enforcement professionals' promotions, among them a day-long seminar during which 1,710 security professionals had been trained by the end of 2008 in operational discernment in working with the public. Further, a guide written by the independent High Authority for the Fight against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE) and the police training center is given to all law enforcement personnel and made available through the intranet.

At the end of 2008, the Interior Ministry reported a positive trend in "unacceptable or shocking" content as measured by an Internet message analysis mechanism, down from the 2007 number. (The 2007 number is reported first/The 2008 number second.): 671/77 such messages were racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, or discriminatory. Among the 671/77 received messages, 324/8 were discriminatory or xenophobic; 297/53 provoked racial, ethnic, or religious hatred; 30/6 defended crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; 17/8 denied crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust; and 3/2 justified discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In 2008 150 local police stations were evaluated using anonymous checks to verify that officers were treating citizens' complaints, including that of having been the victim of discrimination, with the requisite care and attention.

The Education Ministry continued to sponsor nationwide topics and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination. In 2008 the school districts of Aix-Marseille, in the South, created and implemented teams to train school officials and teachers regarding discrimination prevention.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although there were anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the reporting period, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and maintain open lines of communication among different faith communities.

The CNCDH, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported that 2008 witnessed a leveling in anti-Semitic acts--397 compared to 402 reported in 2007. The number of violent anti-Semitic acts reported also remained level in 2008--100 acts, and 106 in 2007, although the slight difference in reporting for both acts overall and violent ones was in a positive direction. Reported anti-Semitic violence in schools declined, from five acts in 2007 to two acts in 2008. CNCDH report authors asserted that contrary to previous years, international events, particularly Middle East tensions, had a profound influence on anti-Semitism in the country, particularly reaction to the conflict in Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009.

The CNCDH noted that its statistical totals for violent anti-Semitic acts in 2008 differed somewhat from the totals cited by the Service for the Protection of the Jewish Community (SPCJ), which reported 100 violent anti-Semitic acts in 2008. CNCDH statisticians pointed out that the discrepancy derives from the CNCDH practice of "counting" events whereas the SPCJ "counts" the number of complaints lodged. In the case of one attack involving two victims, each of whom lodges a complaint, the approaches lead to different totals. The CNCDH plans in future reports to distinguish between events and victims to eliminate this counting discrepancy.

According to the CNCDH report, there was a 5 percent increase in instances of anti-Semitic violence committed by assailants of "Arab-Muslim" origin in 2008, slightly up from 2007. Authorities attributed 11 percent of these assaults to members of extreme right movements and gangs.

The 100 violent anti-Semitic acts registered in 2008 involved 53 acts of physical assault, 26 of damage to personal property, nine of synagogue vandalism, four of cemetery or memorial vandalism, four of damage to professional space, two of school vandalism, and two of defacement of public space. Additionally, there were numerous reports of anti-Semitic slurs and the misuse of the word "Jew" as an insult that the Jewish community found offensive and hurtful.

Prosecutors were ordered to seek maximum punishments for hate crimes and to systematically appeal sentences not considered strong enough.

On May 22, 2009, the Government announced that since 1999, it had paid \$569 million (€10 million) through the Commission for the Compensation of Jewish Victims of Despoilment (CIVS) to victims despoiled in the country during German occupation in World War II.

On May 20, 2009, the Ministry of Interior announced it was seeking to dissolve a "Tribe-K" front-group known as the Kemi Seba Youth Organization (JKS), which authorities accuse of promoting racial and religious violence. On April 3, 2009, the Paris Court of Appeals sentenced Stello Capochichi, alias Kemi Seba, former leader of disbanded radical anti-Semitic group "Tribe K," to an eight-month suspended prison sentence for spreading anti-Semitic remarks on his Internet website in August 2006. Seba wrote on his website that international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Health Organization, were organizations "run by Zionists who impose living conditions on Africa and the African Diaspora that are so excremental that it makes the Auschwitz concentration camp seem like heaven on earth." He was charged with libel, incitation to racial hatred, and contesting crimes against humanity.

On May 15, 2009, a Nanterre court sent to correctional court six individuals arrested in February 2008 for physically assaulting and imprisoning a Jewish youth in Bagneux. The victim was held against his will by his attackers for nine and a half hours before being set free by the group.

On May 3, 2009, during a program on Radio J, a Jewish community radio station, President Sarkozy's General Secretary, Claude Gueant, condemned the initiative of controversial comic Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala to field an "anti-Zionist" electoral list for the European elections on June 7, calling it "absolutely outrageous." Representatives of President Sarkozy's office asked the Ministries of Justice and the Interior to find a way to prevent the list from being submitted, but these efforts were unsuccessful due to constitutional concerns. Persons on Dieudonné's "Anti-Zionist" list failed to win seats in the June 7 European elections.

On April 29, 2009, 27 members belonging to the self-styled "Gang of Barbarians" went on trial in the torture-murder of 23-year-old French national Ilan Halimi, a Jewish youth who was kidnapped in January 2006 in the Paris suburb of Sceaux. He was held hostage and tortured for 24 days before being left for dead next to some railroad tracks in Saint-Genevieve-des-Bois. Halimi died of his injuries while being transported to the hospital. Despite requests from the victim's family and several Jewish institutions, the trial was held behind closed doors because two of the accused were under 18 at the time of the crime. The trial was expected to

last until July 10. Gang leader Youssouf Fofana faced life imprisonment if convicted. He was alleged to have admitted he committed the crime because Halimi was Jewish.

On December 26, 2008, Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala sparked a firestorm of criticism for giving a fictitious award to Holocaust denier and fellow comic Robert Faurisson. Through a stagehand dressed as a WWII-era Jewish deportee wearing a yellow star of David, Dieudonné presented Faurisson an award for "social unacceptability and insolence" at the end of his show at the Zenith theater in Paris. The event was applauded by the more than 5,000 fans in attendance, some of whom included figures from the political far-left and -right, including former National Front presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. Numerous groups opposed to racism and anti-Semitism, including the CRIF, and Minister of Culture Christine Albanel, condemned the event. Dieudonné has been regularly convicted and fined for Holocaust denial and speech that incites racial or ethnic hatred, both of which are illegal in the country. He was facing a judicial inquiry for describing the Holocaust as an "official religion." The Paris prosecutor's office on December 29, 2008, opened a preliminary investigation into the matter. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. If convicted, Dieudonné faced a maximum six-month prison term and a \$30,000 fine.

On October 22, 2008, two Jewish teenagers were attacked in Vitry-sur-Seine by 10 youth. Six persons were arrested. The investigation was ongoing.

On September 6, 2008, three Jewish teenage boys were attacked in the 19th district of Paris in what police authorities initially called a probable anti-Semitic incident; however, upon further investigation it appeared to be gang-related. Police investigators said the victims and one assailant had in their possession or were wearing yarmulkes during the time of the incident. Six aggressors allegedly beat the teenagers, with two of the three victims suffering broken noses. Prosecutors announced that five youths, including two minors, were under investigation for "voluntary violence as a group," without including anti-Semitism among possible motives in the case. One officer told the press that the incident appeared to have been a low-level clash among neighborhood teens "making mischief."

On August 13, 2008, Paris police detained the owner and sales clerk of a woman's clothing store, Belle Star, in the Belleville (19) district of Paris for selling t-shirts bearing the WWII-era Nazi prohibition, "Park Entry Forbidden to Jews." The store owner and her daughter face up to one year in prison if found guilty of inciting racial hatred for promulgating anti-Semitic inscriptions. The case was ongoing.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced a killing, and instances of assault, harassment, and vandalism; however, the situation improved in 2008, during which, according to the CNCDH, there were 97 racist and xenophobic (including anti-Muslim) acts recorded, a more than 60 percent decrease from the 321 acts committed in 2007. The trend was also reflected in a drop in the number of violent incidents from 614 in 2007 to 54 in 2008. Among the 54 violent acts, 36 were committed against individuals of North African origin, and two of the acts were characterized as being specifically anti-Muslim in character.

The 97 racist and xenophobic violent acts reported to the CNCDH in 2008 involved 54 acts of physical assaults, seven of serious cemetery or memorial vandalism, two of mosque vandalism, 19 of damage to personal property, two of damage to public buildings, six of damage to professional spaces, and two of school vandalism. The 370 racist and xenophobic threats and less serious material damage (usually defacement by graffiti) reported to the CNCDH involved 137 acts of written or verbal (including by telephone) threats made to individuals, 215 acts of graffiti on private property or vehicles, and 18 provocative pamphlets and mailings.

On September 8, 2008, a Muslim youth was shot and killed in Paris' 19th district. Mao Peninou, security advisor to the district president, expressed concern about security in the district, noting that this was the first killing with a gun in the district since 2001.

On December 20, 2008, a mosque in Saint-Priest (a suburb of Lyon) was the target of arson. Although the building suffered limited damage and no one was hurt in the blaze, several copies of the Qur'an were burned. Police were searching for the perpetrators. Approximately 1,000 individuals demonstrated peacefully in front of the mosque on December 21, including prominent Socialist Party mayor of Lyon, Gerard Collomb, the rector of the city's Grand Mosque, Kabel Kaptane, and Jewish leaders--to denounce anti-Muslim sentiment and actions in the country. Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie announced December 20 that the investigators would use "all means necessary" to solve the case.

On December 17, 2008, 10 members of the Neo-Nazi group "LW" were convicted for the April 20 Colombiers mosque-burning outside of Toulouse. Eight "LW" members received 18-month prison sentences, while two of the group's leaders each received a maximum three-year sentence for the crime. The group was

ordered to pay fines totaling \$25,025 (€17,500) to the Muslim community and an anti-racist group.

On December 9, 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy denounced as "revolting" and "repugnant" racism directed against the Jewish and Muslim communities in reference to the desecration of Muslim and Jewish graves with swastikas and anti-Islamic slogans at Arras military cemetery on December 8. The incident took place on the eve of the Eid al-Adha holiday. Politicians and religious organizations also roundly condemned the attack, and the Secretary of State for Veterans Affairs immediately announced the installation of eight video cameras in the cemetery.

On September 10, 2008, two neo-Nazi youth were put under investigation for their alleged role in an earlier desecration of the Arras military cemetery. Both were charged for the profanation of a sepulture for reasons of race or religion and for the degradation of property belonging to others. The case was ongoing.

On September 4, 2008, approximately 40 swastikas and 50 racist slogans, such as "death to Arabs," "white power," and other profanity-laden language, were spray-painted inside the entrance at Rene Cassin d'Agde high school outside of Montpellier. School officials shielded incoming students from the affected areas of the building and canceled classes for the day. French Minister of Education Xavier Darcos firmly condemned the incident and reiterated the Government's commitment to combat extremism and racism. Local Socialist Party leaders and French anti-racist organizations joined Darcos in condemning the incident.

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Islamic headscarves may have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community again alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they were refused service by private businesses. Media reports indicated that some companies discouraged female employees from wearing the headscarf or encouraged them to wear a bandanna instead.

On December 4, 2008, two French Muslim schoolgirls in Caen, who were expelled for refusing to remove their headscarves during gym class in 1999, had their legal case brought before the ECHR. While the ECHR judges were sympathetic to the girls, stating that wearing a religious symbol was not incompatible with the principle of secularism, the judges concluded that, according to Article 9 (freedom of thought and religion) of the European Convention on Human Rights, school authorities did not expel the two girls due to their religion; rather, authorities

expelled them for not conforming to the rules set forth by the school district. The ECHR judges held that rules governing the public order preempt the protection of personal liberty.

On September 4, 2008, six Muslim schoolgirls were sent home by schoolmaster Eric Rottier of the Lislet Geoffroy, a Saint-Denis de la Réunion public high school, for violating the 2004 law that forbids wearing religious symbols in public places. Two of the girls returned to school on September 5 after agreeing to remove their veils. The four others left the school, opting to continue their studies via correspondence courses with a Qur'anic school in Saint-Denis.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination during the reporting period. Scientologists continued to follow closely the growing body of precedent-setting case law from the ECHR in order to contest what they regarded as unequal treatment.

During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported 55 acts of vandalism against places of worship in the country, including Molotov cocktails and firearms directed at Jehovah's Witnesses' property. Jehovah's Witnesses' officials noted that of the 55 attacks during the reporting period, two were against individuals who were engaging in door-to-door proselytizing.

The Jehovah's Witnesses awaited a ruling during the reporting period by the ECHR on the admissibility of a case contesting the government's assessment of their donations at a 60 percent tax rate. The government had imposed the high rate relative to other religious groups after ruling the group to be a harmful cult. The assessed tax, which totaled more than \$77.5 million (€7 million) would consume all of the group's buildings and assets in the country and could close them down.

On October 1, 2008, between 600 and 1,000 Jehovah's Witnesses rallied in front of the departmental government offices in Vosges to protest allegations of pedophilia. The allegations and the demonstration arose from a property dispute in the Vosges town of Deyvilliers (1,400 inhabitants), where the Jehovah's Witnesses were planning to build a large church (or Kingdom Hall). A local environmental group, Aded, has lobbied since 2004 against construction of the 1,500-seat facility, which would include a 500-car-space parking lot. In an apparent effort to rally public opinion, Aded organized a public meeting in the town with an American former Jehovah's Witness, Bill Bowen, who is an outspoken critic of the faith. Media reported that at the meeting, Bowen criticized the church's leadership for, in his view, ignoring alleged sexual abuse of minors within the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three seven-member delegations representing the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Churches. In addition, a three-member delegation represents the Armenian Apostolic Church and one observer represents the Anglican Communion. The council serves as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish communities, which addresses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

In March 2009 Rabbi Michel Serfaty, coPresident of the Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association, traveled to Gaza with French Imam Chalghoumi and Jewish writer Marek Halter in an effort to strengthen relations and dialogue for peace among Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Rabbi Serfaty continued to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding by meeting with Muslim local officials and religious counterparts, and by sponsoring international trips to Holocaust sites for local Muslim students.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Representatives from the Embassy met several times with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters. Embassy officers also met regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved with religious freedom. Embassy officials met with and discussed religious freedom with senior representatives from the major faith traditions as well as representatives of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church. Embassy officials hosted visits from Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the CRIF, the European Jewish Congress, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United Jewish Communities, and the Wiesenthal Center. The Embassy also conducted regular outreach to Muslim communities throughout the country, and the Ambassador hosted an annual Iftar with a focus on young Muslim leaders. Farah Pandith, Senior Advisor for Muslim Outreach in Europe, continued to conduct outreach. The Embassy also hosted the visit of a prominent American imam who provided a leadership example for interfaith dialogue.

The Embassy conducts a robust public affairs outreach program to minority communities throughout the country. The Embassy also played a role in supporting projects of reputable NGOs that promote tolerance and fight against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, such as SOS Racisme.

The Embassy's International Visitor Leadership Program during the reporting period, in part due to special programs related to minority communities, included imams and other minority community leaders from throughout the country. The Youth Ambassadors Program, now in its second year, provided an exchange opportunity related to social entrepreneurship for youth leaders in underserved communities.

The Embassy partners with the country's leaders in a range of sectors to share best practices for managing diversity, promoting effective models to allow individuals with different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs to live harmoniously.

GABON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 103,347 square miles and a population of 1.5 million. Approximately 73 percent of the population, including noncitizens, practices at least some elements of Christianity; 12 percent practices Islam (of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); 10 percent practices animism exclusively; and 5 percent practices no religion. Many persons practice elements of both Christianity and animism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. A 1970 decree banning Jehovah's Witnesses remained in effect; however, the Government did not enforce the ban, and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to assemble, practice, and proselytize.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Sunday and Monday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Kebir, and Christmas.

The Ministry of the Interior maintains an official registry of religious groups; however, it does not appear to grant registration to all small, animist groups. The

Government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. No financial benefit is conferred by registration. Religious groups are not taxed, can import duty-free items, and are exempted from land use and construction permit fees.

Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. These schools must register with the Ministry of Education, which is charged with ensuring that these religious group-affiliated schools meet the same standards required for public schools.

The Government promotes interfaith relations by facilitating meetings of leaders of major religious groups. Such meetings are rare, but informal discussions among religious leaders are routine.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

As in previous reporting periods, several mutilated corpses and body parts, suspected of having been connected with ritual killings by practitioners of animism, were found. No information was made public concerning investigations of these crimes.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy maintained contact with the Minister of Human Rights and various nongovernmental organizations to discuss the general state of religion in the country, and the prevention of ritual crimes in particular.

THE GAMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,361 square miles and a population of 1.8 million. Sunni Muslims constitute more than 90 percent of the population. The vast majority are Maliki Sufis, of which the main orders represented are Tijaniyah, Qadiriyyah, and Muridiyyah. Sufi orders pray together at common mosques. Members of the Ahmadiyya order are also represented, while a small percentage of Muslims, predominantly immigrants from South Asia, do not ascribe to any traditional Islamic school of thought.

An estimated 9 percent of the population is Christian, and less than 1 percent practices indigenous animist religious beliefs. The Christian community, situated mostly in the west and south, is predominantly Roman Catholic; there are also Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of various evangelical denominations. There is a small group of Baha'is, and a small community of Hindus among South Asian immigrants.

Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians is very common. In some areas, Islam and Christianity are syncretized with animism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution establishes qadi courts in such places as the chief justice determines. The two qadi courts sit in Banjul and Kanifing. Their jurisdiction applies only to marriage, divorce, and inheritance questions for Muslims. The qadi courts apply traditional Islamic law.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Koriteh (Eid al-Fitr), Tobaski (Eid al-Adha), Yaumul Ashura (the Islamic New Year), and Christmas. The President, a devout Muslim, celebrates Christmas each year with a State Christmas Dinner.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. Faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must meet the same registration and licensing requirements as any other NGOs.

The Supreme Islamic Council is an independent body that advises the Government on religious issues. Although the Government does not have representation on the Council, it provides it with substantial funding. The Minister of Religious Affairs (a role President Jammeh filled during the reporting period) maintains a formal relationship with the Council.

The Government permits religious instruction in schools. Both public and private schools throughout the country provide Biblical and Qur'anic studies without government restriction or interference. The Government funds religious instruction in public schools but this instruction is not mandatory.

Government meetings and events typically commence with two prayers, one Islamic and one Christian. The Government often invites senior officials of both religious groups to open major government events with prayers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

On July 22, 2008, President Jammeh warned Muslims about foreign nationals in and around mosques attempting to recruit persons for violent acts. The President asked the Supreme Islamic Council to "put its house in order" and regulate activities in the mosques. Within a few days, the Supreme Islamic Council denounced extremist violence, which it linked to Shi'ite beliefs, as contrary to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The Council directed all print and electronic media, Islamic/Arabic schools, cultural institutions, and individuals to cease all programs and activities that propagate what it called "radical" Shi'ite beliefs.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were no reports of societal discrimination following the June 2008 conference where prominent Muslim religious leaders disparaged Shi'a Muslims.

The Inter-Faith Group for Dialogue and Peace, comprising representatives of the Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i communities, continued to meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern such as religious freedom and the need to live together in harmony. Some groups such as Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Church of Christ the Redeemer were not part of the Inter-Faith Group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

GEORGIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government continued to improve during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to religious freedom. As government attention shifted to national security challenges following the August 2008 conflict with Russia, implementation of new policies relating to religious freedom appeared to have slowed. Despite this, the Government was able to make progress on religious freedom, particularly in education.

There were continued reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Incidents of harassment were reported outside of Tbilisi involving local citizens, government officials, and Orthodox provocateurs. The Ombudsman's Office reported no new incidents of religious intolerance prior to August 2008 and a perceived increase in incidents following the August conflict. Systemic problems remained largely unchanged, such as the return of church property, legal registration of denominations, unequal legal frameworks, and negative media coverage of non-Orthodox religions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy funded several projects to foster religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 25,900 square miles and a population of 4.6 million, including the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are not under the control of the Government. There are strong correlations between ethnic group, religious affiliation, and often, geographic area.

Most ethnic Georgians (84 percent of the population, according to the 2002 census) associate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). Orthodox Christians who are not Georgian accept the territorial jurisdiction of the GOC and generally use the primary language of their communicants (e.g., Russian, Armenian, or Greek). There remain a small number of mostly ethnic Russian adherents of three dissident Orthodox schools: the Molokani, Staroveriy (Old

Believers), and Dukhoboriy (Spirit Wrestlers). The existence of radical Georgian Orthodox groups such as David the Builder and Orthodox Parents is recognized, but according to the Patriarchy, they are in no way associated with the GOC.

The Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Judaism, and Islam have coexisted with Georgian Orthodoxy for centuries. Azeris comprise the second largest ethnic group (approximately 285,000, or 7 percent of the population) and are largely Muslim; most live in the southeastern region of Kvemo-Kartli, where they constitute a majority. Other Muslim groups include the ethnic Georgian Muslims of Ajara and Chechen Kists in the northeastern region, bringing the Muslims up to 10 percent of the population. Armenians are the third largest ethnic group (estimated at 249,000, or 6 percent of the population) and belong predominantly to the AAC; they constitute the majority of the population in the southern Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

There are an estimated 35,000 Catholics, largely ethnic Georgians or Assyrians, and 18,000 Kurdish Yezidis. The ethnic Greek Orthodox community numbers 15,000. There are an estimated 10,000 Jews.

Protestant and other nontraditional denominations such as Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Krishnas have become more active and prominent. Each of these groups represents less than 1 percent of the population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution recognizes the special role of the GOC in the country's history but also stipulates the independence of church from state. A 2002 concordat between the Government and the GOC also recognizes the special role of the GOC.

The Criminal Code specifically prohibits interference with worship services, persecution of a person based on religious faith or belief, and interference with the establishment of a religious organization. Violations of these prohibitions are punishable by fine and/or imprisonment; violations committed by a public officer or official are considered abuses of power and are punishable by higher fines and/or longer terms of imprisonment.

The Human Rights Protection Unit in the legal department of the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) is charged with protecting human rights, including religious freedom. The Ombudsman (Public Defender) also monitors complaints of restrictions on religious freedom. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the PGO remained active in the protection of religious freedom. Minority religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, expressed satisfaction with the PGO commitment to protecting religious freedom.

The Government observes the following major Orthodox holy days as national holidays: Orthodox Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Orthodox Easter, Easter Monday, the Day of Apostle Andrew, the Day of the Virgin Mary, Svetitskhovloba, and St. George's Day.

Under a 2006 law, religious groups other than the GOC may register with the Government as a Noncommercial Entity of Private Law (in one of several forms such as a union or a foundation) to receive legal status and tax benefits. A union is based on membership (a minimum of five members is required), while a foundation involves one or more founders establishing a fund for furtherance of a certain cause for the benefit of the particular group or the general public. In all cases registration is a function of the tax department of the Ministry of Finance, which must grant or deny registration within three days of application. A refusal may be appealed in court. There were no reports of any groups being refused registration during the reporting period. Some religious groups expressed dissatisfaction with having to register as a Noncommercial Entity of Private Law instead of as a religious group to receive legal status and tax benefits.

Article 18 of the Law on General Education specifies that "pupils, parents, and teachers enjoy freedom of religious belief, denomination, and conscience, according to the rule established by law, and have the right to choose and change any religious denomination at will."

A 2005 law separating state schools and religious teaching narrowed the interpretation of the government concordat with the GOC regarding teaching Orthodoxy as an elective part of the school curriculum. The law states that such Orthodox teaching may take place only after school hours and cannot be controlled by the school or teachers. Outside instructors, including clergy, cannot regularly attend or direct student extracurricular activities or student clubs and their meetings. Lay theologians, rather than priests, led such activities.

By law the GOC has a consultative role in curriculum development but no veto power. The GOC routinely reviews religious and other textbooks used in schools for consistency with Orthodox beliefs, although this review is not conducted within the government structure but rather as part of the GOC's pastoral activities. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), priests are not as active on school grounds as they have been in the past and, in addition, some priests have offered more craft and science activities outside of school to attract children into groups at church.

During the year the government investigated several cases of interference, threats, intimidation, or violence. The PGO continued to exercise prosecutorial discretion to emphasize cases arising after 2003, given its limited investigative and prosecutorial resources. Investigations prior to 2003 were scheduled to continue where feasible, but priority was given to new cases. Religious minority groups pointed out that this could lead to the eventual elimination of cases that could be investigated under law predating 2003.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Respect for religious freedom by the Government continued to improve, and government policy continued to contribute to the free practice of religion in most instances. At the same time, an overarching complaint of religious groups other than the GOC was that they do not have equal legal status, are not recognized officially as religions, and do not enjoy the same privileges as the GOC. Minority religious groups also complained that local police did not always respond promptly to their complaints. Investigations of complaints are often left incomplete.

The 2002 concordat between the GOC and the state defines relations between the two entities. The concordat contains several controversial articles: giving the patriarch legal immunity, granting the GOC the exclusive right to staff the military chaplaincy, exempting GOC clergymen from military service, and giving the GOC a unique consultative role in government, especially in the sphere of education; however, many of the controversial articles require Parliament to adopt implementing legislation, which it had not done by the end of the reporting period.

The Jewish community has been registered as a union for several years, not because it preferred this designation, but simply because the designation allowed them to repair a synagogue. While the synagogue has not been returned to the Jewish community's ownership, the Government has leased it to them for the symbolic price of \$0.61 (one Lari) per month. The ability to "lease" the property

satisfied the investors willing to put up the funding for the repair work. The AAC has refused to register as a union or a foundation, which leaves it without legal identity. The RCC has registered parts of its community in order to have legal control over its properties. This registration arrangement gives it physical control over church buildings and relieves it from the former practice of having to register its religious entities in an individual's name. Nonetheless, the RCC was very careful to underline its discontent with the registration options that "deny dignity." Baptists and the Jehovah's Witnesses shared this complaint. Only the Krishnas were satisfied with the registration options, because it gave the community of 100 practitioners the ability to repair and control its temple but did not focus additional government attention on their presence.

At the end of the reporting period, the RCC-owned Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani Institute of Philosophy, Theology, Culture, and History continued to be denied reaccreditation applied for in 2007. The institute claimed to have addressed the stated issues cited for denial: not knowing the exact number of text books in the institution; not posting the library hours outside the library; not posting the number of visitors on their website; and that its four-year diploma was for Humanities with a specialty in Theology, and Theology is not on the accepted MOE list of subjects for diplomas. Representatives of the Institute were informally told by the group called Orthodox Parents that they would not gain accreditation.

Muslim officials reported that local government and police erected 22 solid crosses in cement in Muslim communities in the Bolnisi District in 2009. The crosses were placed near community centers and cemeteries. The Patriarchy was aware that this happened and called the local bishop to Tbilisi and explained that the crosses were an act of provocation and must not be continued. No crosses were observed in a later visit to the area by a representative of the Ministry of Reintegration. Bolnisi District officials also asked Muslims to curtail or minimize the call to prayer. They did not intercede or fine the mosques but continued to refuse official permission for the public call to prayer.

In previous reporting periods, government authorities argued that the registration law provides an adequate balance between the demands of religious minorities and the desire to safeguard the special status of the GOC. The Government contended that creating a specific status for religious groups per se would result in unnecessary controversy between groups over whatever definition was to be adopted and that the current registration law effectively leads to equal treatment of religious groups. In the Government's view, the registration law was religion-neutral in that its principal concern is only whether an organization is for-profit or

not-for-profit. Registered religious groups receive substantially the same legal protection of their property rights and tax status as the GOC, although authorities conceded that there may be confusion on the part of potential beneficiaries and government implementers. The GOC argued that only largely symbolic preferences remain, befitting the GOC's status under the concordat, such as exemption from initial payment of the value-added tax (versus paying and receiving reimbursement) and exemption from profit on sales of religious artifacts. The Ministry for Reintegration prepared to present a new proposal to the cabinet in early April 2009 to allow all religious groups that applied, to be recognized as Entities of the Public Law. However, the Deputy State Minister for Reintegration was advised not to present the proposal to the cabinet without consultation with the Patriarchy. Upon consultation, the Patriarchy advised that with the unrelated political protests then taking place, that the times were tense and the proposal should wait. The GOC was concerned that official recognition of religious status would result in smaller, better financed groups being better able to draw people to their institutions with the possibility of material assistance.

Restitution of property confiscated during the communist regime remained a contentious issue. During the reporting period, the Government did not return any additional churches, mosques, synagogues, or meeting halls. The main mosque and two synagogues in Tbilisi were operated by their respective religious communities but remained state property. However, restoration of GOC churches previously returned continued, in part with government subsidies on the grounds that the buildings are national cultural heritage sites. The Government also provided subsidies for the maintenance and preservation of mosques on similar grounds. Under an agreement with Turkey, the Ministry of Culture was expected to begin renovation of an Islamic prayer hall in Kobuleti during 2008 but had not begun by the end of the reporting period. Other minority religious groups claimed that state funding is not provided on a neutral and equitable basis. The AAC complained that the church it operates in Tbilisi, which AAC leaders said serves 100,000 congregants, had not received funding because the AAC refused to register with the Government. The Ministry of Culture stated it cannot fund a renovation project there as long as the church has no legally registered owner.

Officials of both the RCC and the AAC believed that property disputes were not resolved in a transparent legal process but rather on a case-by-case basis that distinctly favored GOC claims. They claimed that the Government was unwilling to resolve disputes over the ownership of disputed church properties for fear of offending GOC constituents.

In 2007 the Ministry of Justice adopted plans to rely on disinterested expert opinion for assessment of future ownership disputes, instead of a then-inactive commission that had included a GOC participant. Controversy continued to surround the disposition of the Norashen Church, claimed by both AAC and GOC, which has been closed since 1995. On November 16, 2008, Father Tariel Sikinchelashvili, a Georgian Orthodox Priest, brought a bulldozer into the churchyard, which a Georgian church shared with the Norashen church. To clear the grounds for the bulldozer to pass, he removed and later replaced several Armenian headstones in the yard. Armenian clergy called this action disrespectful to the Armenian remains buried there. At the end of the reporting period, the activity had stopped and the rubble that sat atop some of the Armenian graves had been cleared. A RCC-GOC commission formed to discuss disputed churches made no progress during the reporting period. In contrast to previous reporting periods, however, disputed ownership did not lead to additional interfaith disturbances.

The RCC, AAC, and several Protestant denominations continued to have difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches, due to the reluctance of local authorities to issue building permits that could antagonize local GOC officials. During the reporting period, authorities referred the RCC to a local GOC bishop for permission to build a new church. The GOC bishop suggested that the RCC repair an old church instead, and that suggestion was accepted by local government.

Muslims in Adjara also were unsuccessful in regaining their pre-Soviet era properties. Local officials were unresponsive to repeated requests for the return of the mosques.

In contrast, the GOC had most of its properties restored. During the Soviet era the State seized most GOC properties. Nearly all of these have been returned to the Church. In addition to restoring GOC properties, the Government also allocates grants to the Church every year to help offset some of the damage done during the Soviet era. In 2009 the grant was in the amount of \$15 million (25 million Lari). The Patriarchy reported that those funds would be spent on educational activities and aid to the poor and orphaned.

Three cases filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in response to violent attacks committed against Jehovah's Witnesses by police and other government officials in 2001 were resolved during this reporting period. All three cases were decided in favor of the defendants.

Four additional cases against the Government remain undecided at the ECHR and reflected complaints of violent persecution without subsequent judicial remedies, illegal actions of police officers and other government officials, and liquidation of Jehovah's Witnesses legal entities.

Minority religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, continued to report difficulties obtaining permits to build or occupy houses of worship or to regain control of facilities confiscated during the communist era, although Jehovah's Witnesses no longer considered it necessary to hold services in private homes for security reasons.

Jehovah's Witnesses' construction plans for property bought in Tbilisi has been an ongoing problem. The necessary documents were filed with the Mayor's Office, but permission was denied. In August 2008 an appeal was filed against the Tbilisi City Administration for denying construction permission. In February 2009 the Administrative Court ruled in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses; however, the defendants appealed that decision. Jehovah's Witnesses were involved in several problematic building projects (see Section III).

Jehovah's Witnesses leaders stated they continue to be denied access to halls that seat more than 200 persons and the PGO had not brought charges against any individuals for these denials. Jehovah's Witnesses leaders stated they did not plan to press for prosecution but hoped to resolve the issue by receiving permission to build their own large hall. They have not proceeded with this plan but continued to try to rent venues.

Plans to build a Jehovah's Witnesses community center in the Avlabari region of Tbilisi were halted by municipal officials who questioned whether the group legally obtained the property. As of May 2008 the group had still not been granted a preliminary construction permit, the first step toward beginning the project. At the end of the reporting period, the city of Tbilisi was considering an application by the Jehovah's Witnesses to purchase a plot of land near the Tbilisi Sea (reservoir) for the construction of a large assembly hall.

The Ombudsman reported continuing problems with teachers reinforcing Orthodox theology through classroom prayer and the display of icons and other religious symbols in schools. The Ombudsman characterized this problem as especially common in Adjara, where Muslim students are frequently the target of religious pressure from Orthodox teachers. The MOE instituted a General Inspection Department to deal with complaints of inappropriate teacher behavior, including

violations of the religious freedom of students. During the reporting period, the General Inspection Department stated that only one complaint of a violation of religious freedom was filed, in April 2008 by a Jewish teacher who felt her religion had led to mistreatment by her colleagues. An investigation by the General Inspection Department was underway at the end of the reporting period.

Minority religious leaders continued to complain to the Ombudsman's Office that some public school teachers and local Orthodox priests continued to criticize minority religious groups and interfaith marriages. Some teachers reportedly ridiculed Catholic and Protestant students, discouraging Orthodox followers from interacting with them.

In the 2009 reporting period, Roman Catholics noted that teachers said that children who make the sign of the cross in school in the orthodox manner are "making the sign of God," while children who make the sign of the cross in the Roman Catholic manner are "making the sign of the devil." At school, staff will assume a child is Orthodox Christian unless they are made aware otherwise, which can then be the source of difficulty at school. For this reason, Roman Catholics, Baptists, and Krishnas all remarked that parents found the school environment better for their children if their household did not announce its religious affiliations in its community.

Jehovah's Witnesses' leaders reported that harassment at school of their children's faith decreased significantly during the reporting period. They credited intervention by the Ombudsman's Office and the actions of the General Inspection Department of the MOE. Community leaders said they had received no complaints during the reporting period of Jehovah's Witnesses' children being harassed or discriminated against in school by teachers or students.

The separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions remained outside the control of the central Government, and reliable information from those regions was difficult to obtain. A 1995 decree issued by the de facto Abkhaz leader that banned Jehovah's Witnesses in the region remained in effect but was not enforced. The group reported that it continued to hold services in Abkhazia but limited its activities because of the decree. Baptists, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics also reported that they were allowed to operate in the region, but the GOC reported that it was unable to do so.

In March 2009 the de facto Abkhaz authorities accused three GOC priests of spying and on April 4, 2009, expelled them from Abkhazia. In early April 2009

Abkhaz de facto authorities expelled four Georgian monks and three nuns of the Saint Giorgi Church in the village of Azhara in Kodori Gorge reportedly for not recognizing Abkhaz de facto jurisdiction over Kodori Gorge. According to press reports they were first taken to Sukhumi, interrogated, and urged to take Abkhaz "passports." They refused to accept the documents and said they were subordinate only to the GOC. They were then expelled. The monks crossed the administrative boundary at the Enguri Bridge into Georgian-controlled territory. While they were traveling, Russian forces shot guns in the air for five minutes, presumably to intimidate those waiting for the monks at the bridge.

In South Ossetia, GOC adherents remained unable to hold services in GOC churches located near the ethnic Georgian villages of Nuli, Eredvi, Monasteri, and Gera because these areas were under the control of de facto South Ossetian authorities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no developments reported in the investigation into the May 2007 incident involving unidentified individuals who insulted and physically abused Jehovah's Witnesses Davit Shermadini and David Karamiani in Gldani and forcibly took their Jehovah's Witnesses literature, destroying it at the scene. At the end of the reporting period, the investigation continued.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious minorities generally welcomed the removal of religious education from public schools except for instruction about religion in a broad historical context; however, religious minorities and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) observed that practice did not always keep pace with the law. In the reporting period, the MOE noted a marked reduction in religious shrines at school and some additional effort by teachers to keep religion out of the classroom.

In the past, public schools offered an elective course on religion in society, which covered the history of major religions. Parents complained that the course's teachers and textbooks focused solely on the Orthodox Church. In July 2007 the MOE suspended work on a new curriculum that was to have addressed the public's complaints because the working group could not agree on content. The MOE was able to complete a curriculum in 2009 that met the needs of the education system. The MOE had some difficulty when it tried to introduce the course as an independent and required subject. However, they were able to successfully add the course into the existing history curriculum.

History and geography courses provided some coverage of world religious groups. The MOE replaced older textbooks that contained themes or materials considered inappropriate under legislation promoting religious freedom. The new textbooks include materials on religious groups other than the GOC and discuss them in a neutral fashion. During 2007 and 2008 new textbooks were introduced for the second, eighth, and eleventh grades. In the national history and geography curriculum, schools must teach religious beliefs only as a component of a generally chronological or thematic treatment of history and culture, describing religious themes, texts, and beliefs without endorsement or favor. As early as the third grade, excerpts from religious texts with religious themes may be taught in literature courses, for instance. MOE guidelines state that such texts and themes are to be integrated with civic and moral teachings to emphasize interfaith tolerance and mutual understanding. Plans call for civic curriculum guidelines to make religious tolerance an element of mandatory civic training in the seventh through ninth grades. The MOE reported that the implementation of these plans, however, has been delayed because resources have been focused on other elements of the national curriculum.

At the end of the reporting period, the leaders of the Tbilisi Mosque, who had refused to register under the current law, and who had previously reported difficulties in importing religious materials, successfully received religious literature ordered in 2008 and 2009 from Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In the previous reporting period an intervention by the Ombudsman with the Directorate of Prisons led to improvements in ecclesiastical prison visits. At the request of the Directorate of Prisons, the Religious Council of the Ombudsman, which includes a wide range of religious groups, compiled a list of clergymen who were expected to be granted prison access for ecclesiastical visits. This procedure was designed to balance the interests of religious access and security. During this reporting period, the GOC took on the responsibility of monitoring access to

religious freedom for prisoners. A rabbi reported that this worked well and he was able, with the help of the GOC, to provide kosher food to those inmates who require it and to visit prisoners every week.

On April 24, 2009, the Government and the GOC signed a memorandum of agreement stating that the GOC will take the responsibility to facilitate the resocialization of convicts through their involvement in church life and active participation in publically useful work. The details of this process were not spelled out, and much coordination remained in order to implement the agreement.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were continued reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Incidents of harassment were reported outside of Tbilisi involving local citizens, government officials, and Orthodox provocateurs. There appeared to be a general tolerance toward minority religious groups "traditional" to the country, including Catholics, Armenian Apostolic Christians, Jews, and Muslims. However, some members of the GOC and the public remained apprehensive toward "nontraditional" religious minorities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Baptist Church. Some persons viewed minority religious groups as a threat to the national church and the country's cultural values.

During the year there were five attacks on members of religious minorities. Police were quick to respond to incidents of abuse but slower in their follow-up to crimes they viewed as minor "hooliganism," defined as actions that violate public order or demonstrate open contempt toward society by using violence or threats of violence.

A number of religious minorities reported continuing media hostility. Some religious minority leaders noted that the media simply ignored their communities, providing no coverage of their activities. Muslims said that no government official, with the exception of a representative from the Ombudsman's Office, had visited a mosque to celebrate any activity. Although local officials participate in GOC celebrations they do not participate in other local religious events, which may limit media coverage.

During this reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses provided a list of 27 incidents involving harassment reported to the authorities, eight of which were in Tbilisi (compared to the corresponding 18 and 9 reported last year). Approximately half of the complaints involved harassment when Jehovah's

Witnesses, working in pairs, tried to talk with people about Bible stories. The other half involved physical damage to meeting places, especially kingdom halls (Jehovah's Witnesses' church buildings) under construction, and to cars associated with the buildings. Of the 27 incidents, 3 were prosecuted, 1 was dropped, and 23 remained unresolved. Of those incidents prosecuted, one was for physical violence to people proselytizing, an incident involving verbal abuse was excused, and an incident involving stones being thrown during a demonstration at a construction site was resolved with fines and warnings to the perpetrators. The perpetrators of these incidents reportedly included a mayor, local priests, and school teachers. These numbers do not include the numerous cases of crosses painted on opposing ends of kingdom halls and buildings (as if to contain the Witnesses with this sacred symbol) and other graffiti.

The GOC continued to complain that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC's) Moscow Theological Seminary was training Abkhaz priests for service in Abkhazia, the breakaway region. Despite the fact that the ROC says that it recognizes the GOC as a legitimate church in Abkhazia, the GOC Patriarchate claimed that the ROC was sending in priests loyal to the ROC Patriarchate in Moscow under the pretext of setting up indigenous Abkhaz churches.

The RCC reported that in the southern region of Adygnei, as well as in the city of Akhaltsikhe, Roman Catholics faced a hostile environment.

During previous reporting periods, incidents of abuse were committed by or attributed to a small group of GOC extremists, who were subsequently repudiated by the GOC and prosecuted. On July 25, 2008, one such extremist, Basil Mkalavishvili, was released from prison and now has a small congregation in the Tbilisi area. According to the GOC Mkalavishvili is no longer officially connected to the GOC, because he was excommunicated and de-frocked. However, Mkalavishvili still acts and dresses like a priest and to his flock probably functions as such.

There were occasional media reports of minor incidents of violence between ethnic Azeris and ethnic Georgians or Armenians; however, according to the Ombudsman's Office, the incidents did not appear to be motivated by religious differences.

In the second half of 2008 the Ombudsman reported attacks and intolerance against Muslims, the True Orthodox Church, Salvation Army, Evangelical-Pentecostal Church, and Rerikh Society. Systematic problems such as the unfulfilled return of

church property, registration of the so-called traditional denominations, unequal legal framework, and negative media coverage remained unchanged.

On October 9, 2008, the last of a series of damaging attacks occurred on the Evangelical-Pentecostal prayer house in the town of Vani. The pastor of the church met with the deputy head of the Vani Ministry of Internal Affairs, who explained to him that the existence of sects was unacceptable to the residents of Vani. After the intervention of the Ombudsman's Office, criminal proceedings were instigated against the police chief.

In the village of Plate of the Adigeni District (Samtskhe-Javakheti region) some local members of the GOC congregation had been tearing down an inactive mosque since 2007 (previously unreported). They were using the stone to build a church at the Zarzma monastery. As a result of complaints, the activity was halted by the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, Muslims living in the village of Chale in the Adigeni District reported verbal incidents of harassment in the streets, schools, and in other institutions. The former mosque located in the village of Mukhaestate in the Kobuleti region was occupied by local police, while another mosque in the town of Kobuleti itself "hosted" a dancing studio. In the Adigeni District, there were approximately seven mosques built by Meskhetian Turks that were inactive and were being used by others to keep their cattle. The Muslim population (composed mostly of migrants from Ajara) was not able to reclaim those mosques. Meskhetians who returned to the town of Abastumani also requested return of their mosque.

The Muslim community of Ajara has been barred from registration in the territory of the Ajaran Autonomous Republic. Only one Muslim organization of Ajara managed to obtain legal registration by coming to Tbilisi to do so after being refused by local officials.

There were some complaints in connection with the process of postponement of mandatory military service. An Adventist did not address the relevant agency in a timely manner with a request for substituting mandatory military service with alternative service. As a result, he was serving in the mandatory military service in the Penitentiary Department. On the recommendation of the Ombudsman's Office, the issue was being reviewed. The Adventist was relieved from his duty on Saturdays because of his religious beliefs.

On September 23, 2008, as a result of the involvement of the Ombudsman's Office, the right of a pastor from the Jehovah's Witnesses to defer military service was granted until 2012. On February 19, 2008, he had been summoned to the Tbilisi Vake-Saburtalo military district for conscription into military service. His request to postpone military service was rejected based on the "explanation" that the Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses as a religion. No disciplinary action was taken against the official who initially denied his application.

In a second incident, in November 2008 the Administrative Court of Tbilisi ruled in favor of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses who was appointed as a ministerial servant of his congregation while he was serving his alternative military service. According to the "Law on Alternative Service "(article 17.3), the member of Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that he should be released from service without delay because he had become a religious minister. The Department of Alternative Service and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Matters both had denied the request before it went to the Administrative Court. The Department of Alternative Service complied with the order to free him from alternative service.

Since the country's independence 18 years ago, the AAC has claimed ownership of 6 inactive churches. The disputed churches are owned by the state. The government position is that the issues should be resolved with the consensus of the Government, the AAC, and the GOC.

In February 2009 the Ombudsman's Office confirmed that the doors of the Word of Life Church in Tbilisi were fired upon. Police were called, and a criminal case formally initiated. However, the Ombudsman believed that the comment made by the police officer, that this act was committed by some "disgruntled members of the church congregation," was not appropriate and expressed doubt that the case would be properly investigated.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials, including the Ambassador, frequently met with representatives of Parliament, various religious groups, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom.

The Embassy funded several projects to foster religious tolerance, including research grants, visitor program presentations, and speaker program sponsorships. In July 2006 the U.S. Government began funding a four-year, \$2.7 million project

to promote an increased sense of national unity among citizens through support to the Government in forming its national integration strategy and action plan, designed to empower citizens and organizations to effectively discuss, debate, and resolve a range of matters related to building a cohesive multiethnic and multifaith nation. While inclusion of ethnic minorities is the focus of this activity, promoting interfaith tolerance is an important component of the work. The project provides technical assistance, diversity training, and small grants to local NGOs, and also supports a weekly talk/variety show on public television dedicated to integration and tolerance issues, on which prominent religious leaders have been featured.

GERMANY

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion with some exceptions.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government made positive efforts to improve the integration of Muslims and other minorities into society, investigated and prosecuted criminal behavior by extremists directed at religious groups, and promoted tolerance education. Nonetheless, there continue to be concerns about societal and governmental (federal and state) treatment of certain religious minorities, notably Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims.

In addition, there were problems with societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Right-wing extremists committed politically motivated crimes against minorities including religious groups, as well as anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic acts. Jewish cemeteries were desecrated. Muslim communities sometimes suffered societal discrimination when building new mosques and seeking allotments of land for cemeteries; however, many members of Government and civil society initiated discussions about Muslim integration and expressed their commitment to addressing the issue. The Roman Catholic and Evangelical Churches continued to use "sect commissioners" to warn the public of dangers from some minority religious groups such as the Unification Church, Scientologists, Universal Life (Universelles Leben), and Transcendental Meditation practitioners. Scientologists continue to find "sect filters" used against them in employment as well as discrimination in political party membership.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government placed particular emphasis on support for direct dialogue between representatives of minority religious groups and relevant government officials. The U.S. Embassy in Berlin engaged actively with the Muslim communities, including through public outreach, exchange, and other programs that promote religious tolerance, diversity, and greater understanding between faiths.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 137,847 square miles and a population of 82.3 million. There are no official statistics on religious groups; however, unofficial estimates and figures provided by religious organizations give an approximate breakdown of the membership of the country's denominations. The data below are compiled from a variety of sources.

The Roman Catholic Church has a membership of 25.5 million. The Evangelical Church, a confederation of the Lutheran, Uniate, and Reformed Protestant Churches, has 24.8 million members. Together, these two Churches account for nearly two-thirds of the population.

Protestant Christian denominations include: the New Apostolic Church, 366,979; Ethnic German Baptists from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), 75,000-100,000; and Baptist, 84,096. Muslims number approximately 4.3 million, including 2.6 million Sunnis, 400,000 Alevis, and 225,500 Shi'a. There are no official figures on the number of religious conversions. The "Zentralinstitut Islamarchiv Deutschland" (the Central Institute of the Islamic Archives in Germany) estimates that until 2004 the annual number of conversions to Islam was 300, largely female Christian native citizens marrying Muslim men; however, since 2004 the annual number of conversions has increased into the thousands. There are approximately 2,600 Islamic places of worship, including an estimated 150 traditional architecture mosques, with 100 more planned. Approximately 45 percent of Muslim immigrants have adopted the country's citizenship. Orthodox Christians number 1.4 million, including 450,000 Greek Orthodox/Constantinople Patriarchate; 250,000 Serbian Orthodox; 300,000 Romanian Orthodox; and 150,000 Russian Orthodox/Moscow Patriarchate. Buddhists number 245,000 and Hindus 97,500. Jehovah's Witnesses recorded 166,000 active missionary members and approximately 40,000 nonactive members. The Church of Scientology operates 18 churches and missions, and according to press reports, has 30,000 members. However, according to the Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) in Brandenburg and Hamburg, the Church of Scientology has 5,000-7,000 members.

According to estimates, Jews number more than 200,000, of which 106,435 are registered members of the Jewish community. Of these registered community members, 101,829 are immigrants and 4,606 are originally from the country. From 1990 to 2008, approximately 102,000 Jews and non-Jewish dependents from the countries of the FSU arrived, joining 25,000 to 30,000 Jews already in the country. As a result of a more restrictive immigration policy regarding Jews from the FSU, the number of Jewish immigrants decreased to 862 in 2008 from 1,296 in 2007 and 1,971 in 2006. The new policy was designed in cooperation with Jewish

organizations in order to better manage the integration of individuals into the Jewish community.

An estimated 21 million persons (one-quarter of the population) either have no religious affiliation or are members of unrecorded religious organizations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion with some exceptions. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors; however, discrimination against and unequal treatment of some minority religious groups remained a problem at the local level, in part because of the legal/constitutional structure of church-state relations. The structure for managing church-state relations, established in 1949, has been gradually adapting to the country's increasingly diverse religious composition.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the state, and groups may organize themselves for private religious purposes without constraint. Religious organizations must register in order to qualify as nonprofit associations with tax-exempt status. State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status. Their decisions are subject to judicial review. Organizations that apply for tax-exempt status must provide evidence, through their own statutes, history, and activities, that they are a religion. Local tax offices occasionally conduct reviews of tax-exempt status.

Religion and state are separate, although a special partnership exists between the state and those religious communities that have the status of a "corporation under public law." Any religious organization may request that it be granted "public law corporation" (PLC) status, which, among other things, entitles it to name prison, hospital, and military chaplains and to levy a tithe (averaging 9 percent of income tax) on its members that the state collects. PLCs pay a fee to the Government for this tax service; however, not all avail themselves of it. The decision to grant PLC status is made at the state level based on certain requirements, including an assurance of permanence, the size of the organization, and an indication that the organization is not hostile to the constitutional order or fundamental rights. An estimated 180 religious groups have been granted PLC status, including the Evangelical and Catholic Churches, the Jewish community, the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Christian Scientists, and the Salvation Army. In June 2006, after a 10-year legal effort by the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, the State of Berlin granted the organization PLC status. Since then, Bavaria, Brandenburg, Hamburg, Hesse, Lower-Saxony, Saarland, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, and Thuringia have extended PLC status to state branches of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

On May 12, 2009, Baden-Wuerttemberg's State Ministry of Culture also proposed granting PLC status to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Approval was expected on July 28, 2009; however, the governing parties reportedly raised concerns and were now considering whether to task the OPC to investigate the Jehovah's Witnesses for lacking loyalty to the country's legal order.

Muslim communities remained an exception. In principle, the federal Government is in favor of the states' granting public law corporation status to Muslim communities but has indicated a desire that Muslims agree upon a single organization with which the states and the federal Government can negotiate. On April 9, 2007, the four largest Muslim religious organizations formed the "Muslim Coordination Council" (KRM), which claims to represent Muslims in the country. Whether and when this group would meet legal requirements for registration as a PLC was unclear and was to be decided on the state level; however, some observers, including the Federal Interior Minister, were on record that the Muslim Coordination Council represented only those who were traditionally observant, or approximately 10 to 15 percent of the total Muslim population.

Achieving PLC status has potential implications for Muslims in the country who wish a traditional Islamic burial, which consists of burial in a shroud facing Mecca, in a cemetery permanently dedicated only to Islamic burial. These conditions conflict with some states' laws or customs, which require a coffin be buried in a cemetery in a rented plot, which will be turned over every 30 or 60 years. The state of North Rhine-Westphalia changed its burial law in 2003 to authorize local communities to allow shroud burials. The Baden-Wuerttemberg state parliament amended a law on March 16, 2009, to allow corpses to be buried in an open coffin, but stopped short of allowing shroud burial. Eleven of the 16 federal states currently allow burial without a coffin. Few Islamic cemeteries existed nationally. There were cemeteries, however, such as in Frankfurt, which had sections reserved for Muslim burials. Similar arrangements existed in Berlin.

The Government has also developed a policy framework to promote integration of the Muslim community, including the Interior Ministry's Islam Conference and the Chancellery's Integration Summit. The Interior Ministry held its fourth plenary of the Islam Conference on June 25, 2009, the last session before national elections on September 27.

On November 6, 2008, the Chancellery's parallel Integration Summit met. These conferences are multiyear efforts that address key areas of debate such as the legal status of Islam and issues related to social and religious practice, particularly in Muslim communities, including headscarves and schoolgirls' participation in athletic activities. Both measures attempt to bring together representatives from the wide spectrum of the Muslim community, from the very traditional to the nearly secular.

The Islam Conference can claim the increased public attention to Muslim integration as a major success. Although consensus among the Conference's diverse participants on various issues could not be reached at the Conference's conclusion, participants remained committed to the process and expected long-term progress. Working groups of both the Islam Conference and the Integration Summit met frequently during the reporting period. The Interior Ministry published a 32-page document of recommendations and findings of the Islam Conference's working groups, among them guidelines for schools regarding the wearing of headscarves, and students', particularly girls', participation in sports lessons; recommendations on Islamic religious instruction in public schools; a call for broader and unbiased media coverage of Muslim life in Germany; more transparency in cooperation between Muslim organizations and governmental authorities; and greater sensitivity and awareness regarding extremist views within Muslim communities.

By the end of the reporting period, eight states had enacted laws banning female Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves at work, after the Federal Constitutional Court cleared the way in 2003 for the state legislation. New legislation generally used language that could be applied to wearing any symbol that could be interpreted as rejecting constitutional values or supporting oppression. Courts upheld headscarf bans in several cases. The Federal Supreme Court ruled in 2003 that banning of headscarves is within state legislative jurisdiction, and subsequently Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Bremen, Lower Saxony, North-Rhine Westphalia, and Saarland passed headscarf bans for teachers at public schools, while Berlin and Hesse passed laws to ban headscarves for all civil servants.

On February 26, 2009, the Rhineland-Palatinate Christian Democratic Union (CDU) submitted an initiative to introduce a headscarf law in the state's public schools that was rejected by the governing Social Democratic Party (SPD).

In North-Rhine Westphalia, the law was challenged. However, on December 10, 2007, the Hesse State Constitutional Court upheld the state's headscarf ban. The Hesse ban as applied allows state institutions to prevent civil servants, including public school teachers, from wearing headscarves, while making exceptions for Christian religious symbols or clothing.

On June 26, 2008, the Federal Administrative Court ruled that the state of Bremen's ban on the wearing of headscarves disproportionately limits the basic right to freedom of profession. The court argued that due to the headscarf ban, a teacher trainee plaintiff was unable to complete her teacher education by performing her student-teaching requirement.

In July 2007 a Hesse state court ruled that a legal intern was not allowed to wear a headscarf in court if she is publicly recognized as a representative of the judiciary.

On April 10, 2008, in a first confirmation of the NRW headscarf ban by an appellate court, the Higher Labor Court in Duesseldorf upheld a lower court ruling from June 5, 2007, which ruled that a female Muslim teacher at a NRW public school is not allowed to wear a beret covering her hair and ears while teaching. The court ruled that in her case such a beret is considered a "surrogate" Islamic headscarf.

Paragraph 166 of the criminal code addresses the insulting of faiths, religious societies, and ideological groups. An incitement intended to disturb the public order, is punishable with up to three years in prison and a fine. Prosecution has not resulted in significant numbers of convictions.

The Government subsidizes some religious organizations for historical and cultural reasons. In view of the country's culpability for the Holocaust, the states have accepted as a permanent duty the obligation to provide financial support to the Jewish community, including support for reconstruction of old and construction of new synagogues. On November 23, 2008, a cornerstone for a new synagogue in Mainz was laid with support from city and state officials. The Government financed the repair and restoration of some Christian churches and monasteries that the state expropriated in 1803. Newer churches and mosques do not generally

receive subsidies for maintenance or construction. State governments also subsidize various institutions affiliated with public law corporations, such as religious schools and hospitals, which provide public services.

The 2003 "State Agreement on Cooperation" between the Federal Government and the Central Council of Jews supplements the funding received by the Jewish community from the states. Approximately \$4.65 million (€3.1 million) is provided annually to the Central Council to maintain the Jewish cultural heritage, restore the Jewish community, and support integration and social work. On September 24, 2008, the Government decided to increase annual funding for the Jewish Community to \$6.97 million (€5 million). The Central Council reports annually to the Government on the use of the funds. The agreement emphasizes that the Central Council of Jews supports all branches of Judaism with the funds provided. On June 18, 2009, three (reform) rabbis were ordained at the "Abraham Geiger Kolleg" in Potsdam, together with the first Jewish cantor trained in Germany since WWII. On June 2, 2009, the first two orthodox rabbis trained in the country since 1945 were ordained at the Ohel Jakob Synagogue in Munich. They were trained at the rabbi seminar in Berlin, founded in 2005, which is the first institution for training Orthodox Jews in Europe since WWII.

The Government maintains a stated position of neutrality in religious matters since it has no official faith or state church. It does not declare religious holidays as national holidays. Individual states determine which religious holidays are observed, and these vary from state to state.

Most public schools offer Protestant and Catholic religious instruction in cooperation with those churches, as well as instruction in Judaism if enough students express interest. The number of Islamic religion classes in public schools continued to grow. In principle, participants of the federal government-sponsored Islam Conference agreed that Islamic education should be made widely available. Education is a state responsibility; and in part because no nationally recognized Islamic organization exists that could assist in developing a curriculum or providing services, the form and content of Islamic instruction vary from state to state. Organizations providing Islamic instruction do not have PLC status.

All states offer religious instruction as well as ethics courses. In most states, students who do not wish to participate in religious instruction can substitute ethics courses. In Berlin and Brandenburg, the ethics course is compulsory, while the course on religion is voluntary. In an April 26, 2009, referendum, Berlin voters rejected a legislative proposal that would have allowed Berlin public school

students to take classes in religion instead of mandatory ethics classes. Religion and ethics courses are treated equally in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia, meaning a student can choose either one.

There are an estimated 750,000 to 900,000 Muslim students in the public school system. Islamic classes in public schools continued to be a controversial topic but were increasingly common throughout the country, except in areas where the Muslim population was too small to support them. Although no Muslim group had PLC status that would entitle them to offer Islamic courses, state governments recognized the need and demand and worked with local Muslim organizations to establish such courses. In Hesse, the state government reached out to local Muslim groups to identify appropriate partnerships to assist in establishing Islam religious instruction in public schools. Since summer 2008, North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) has introduced regular religion classes for Allemites at seven schools. In March 2009 the Bavarian state government decided to start a 5-year pilot project on Islam courses. German-speaking classes will be offered optionally in all Bavarian schools and cover intercultural and interreligious issues. The state was recruiting teachers.

At the start of the 2006-07 school year, authorities in Baden-Wuerttemberg established a two-course system: one for Sunni and Shi'a students and another for Alevis. State officials and Muslim groups in Baden-Wuerttemberg agreed upon the system and the initial reactions were positive, but as of April 2009 only 10 of the state's nearly 4,700 public schools offered such courses. Some states offered similar programs, while others were working with Muslim leaders to establish a uniform curriculum. Later in the year, universities in Frankfurt, Ludwigsburg, Karlsruhe, and Weingarten began offering training courses in the teaching of Islam.

In February 2009 the first German-speaking private school for imam training opened in Berlin-Karlshorst. Over a six-year training period, young Muslims were scheduled to be educated to be prayer leaders for Muslim communities. The school is financed by private donations.

On April 23, 2009, Lower Saxony Interior Minister Uwe Schünemann announced plans to institute training for imams in the state. The project is twofold. It includes a one-year intensive course, including civic education, German language, and a dialogue with the Christian churches, which primarily is directed at Turkish-Islamic Union of the Agency for Religious Affairs (DITIB) mosques. (Currently, DITIB imams provided by the Turkish government stay in the country for two to

three years and rarely speak the country's language or possess any knowledge of the country's culture and society, a situation that is viewed as undermining integration efforts.) Second, the training includes a two-year studies program leading to a bachelor's degree. The project resonated positively with the Turkish Attaché for Religion and is supported by the Lower Saxony Ministries of Education and Research. Of the 2,600 mosques in the country, 233 are located in Lower Saxony.

At the University of Muenster in NRW, the holder of the country's first chair for training secondary school teachers in Islamic religious instruction made headlines in September 2008 when the KRM announced that it would cease cooperation with him due to "serious discrepancies between the principles of Islamic doctrine and [the professor's] published opinions," adding that it could "no longer recommend that Muslim students enroll in courses with him." After receiving threats by Muslim extremists who resented his call for "modern, historically critical methods in Islamic theology," the professor, a convert to Islam, was placed under police protection in April 2009. His institute was moved to an undisclosed location, and students were asked to observe strict secrecy as to the course location. In a related development, a second chair of Islamic studies (for the training of Muslim religion teachers) was established at Muenster University, which was to be filled in summer 2009. A political controversy within the NRW government coalition developed over the issue of whether or not the KRM should have a say in filling that position at the university.

In March 2009 an adult education center in Offenbach, Hesse, began offering integration classes for imams. The courses are financed by the local authorities.

The legal requirement that children attend school, confirmed by the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Justice in 2006, continued to be a problem for some home-schooling advocates for religious reasons, due to concerns about sex education and the teaching of evolution.

On October 14, 2008, the Stuttgart Administrative Court ruled that a group of Baptists in the Hohenlohe County were allowed to run their own private school, which had been established illegally in 2005. However, the Stuttgart Court required that this private school must match similar criteria met by public schools, including teaching evolutionary theory and providing adequate education for the school's teachers.

On December 20, 2008, an American family that home schooled its children was forced to leave the country because they were denied residency permits. The Robinson family arrived in the country in March 2007 with their three school-age children and were denied residency permits when the couple indicated that they planned to home school their children. They lost their appeal in the Ansbach Administrative Court on January 25, 2008, and have since returned to the United States.

The Bachmans, a Baptist family residing in the country since 1989, has 13 children and decided to home school them. They have consequently had problems with the local public school system and have reported harassment by local authorities. Legal proceedings ended with no solution. In 2008 the Bachmans were unable to obtain a visa extension for their 15-year-old daughter who was born in the country. The authorities later issued the extension.

In December 2008 the Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt granted an appeal filed by the Dudek family of Herleshausen, northern Hesse, in August and remanded the case to the original court. The case was pending and stems from the June 2008 Kassel regional court sentencing of the Dudek parents, to three-months' imprisonment for refusing to send their six school-age children to school. The parents insisted on instructing their children at home, arguing that state schools would contradict their Christian teachings.

In August 2008 a family belonging to an independent Protestant religious group from Bissingen an der Teck in Baden-Wuerttemberg left the country after losing a two-year battle to gain state approval to home school their children. The family filed for political asylum in the United States.

There were no new developments in the Ministry of Defense efforts to develop a Muslim chaplaincy within the military. The efforts had failed because of an inability to reach agreement on a plan with multiple Muslim groups. Independently, the Ministry developed a code of conduct to facilitate the practice of Islam by an estimated 3,000 Muslim soldiers, which remained in effect.

The General Act on Equal Treatment prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, or race but also prohibits discrimination based on religion, disability, age, and sexual identity. In 2002 the Federal Constitutional Court defined the Government's "warning" function with respect to nontraditional religions, ruling that the Government could characterize nontraditional religions as "sects," "youth religions," and "youth sects," and is allowed to provide accurate information about

them to the public; however, the Government may not defame these religious groups by using terms such as "destructive," "pseudo-religious," or "manipulative."

Over the last decade, the Church of Scientology has filed legal challenges against many public and private practices used to discriminate against Scientologists in public and private life. These have included suits against the monitoring of the Church by state OPC offices against the use in hiring practices of the so-called "sect-filter," and against workplace discrimination. The Courts rendered final, binding decisions on two key issues: the religious bona fides of Scientology and the improper use of so-called "sect filters" to blacklist and boycott Scientologists in the public and private sector.

Since 2005 applicants for citizenship in Bavaria have been required to fill out a questionnaire regarding their affiliation with organizations under observation by the state OPC, including Scientology.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Federal Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Some state governments and federal agencies did not recognize certain belief systems, including Scientology, as religions; however, the absence of recognition did not prevent their adherents from engaging in public and private religious activities.

In November 2008 the Federal Conference of Interior Ministers, meeting in Berlin, decided against pursuing a ban of the Church of Scientology based on findings of the state and federal OPCs that not enough evidence existed to meet legal requirements for such a ban. In December 2007 the country's state interior ministers unanimously agreed that the Church of Scientology posed a threat to the country's constitutional order and tasked state and federal OPCs to gather information on Scientology to justify a ban.

In recent years, several state OPCs have opted to stop their surveillance of Scientology, but the federal and some state OPCs in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, and Lower Saxony, continued their surveillance. On February 12, 2008, the higher Administrative Court in Muenster rejected the Church of Scientology's appeal of a 2004 Cologne court-ruling, stating that OPC surveillance was justified and could continue. The appellate court in Muenster found that there were "concrete indications" that Scientology intended to

establish a social order contrary to constitutional principles such as human dignity and equality before the law. The court ruled that this decision justified the continued surveillance of Scientology by the OPC, including surveillance via intelligence means. Scientology originally appealed this decision but abandoned its appeal on April 28, 2008. The decision of the Muenster court thus became final and cannot be appealed. Scientology is mentioned in the OPC reports of eight federal states: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Saxony, and Thuringia.

Federal and some state authorities continued to classify Scientology as a potential threat to democratic order, resulting in discrimination against Scientologists in both the public and private sectors. Several states publish pamphlets about Scientology (and other religious groups) that detail the Church's ideology and practices. States defend the practice by noting their responsibility to respond to citizens' requests for information about Scientology as well as other subjects. The pamphlets warn of the dangers the Church poses to democracy, the legal system, and human rights.

In response to concerns about Scientology's ideology and practices, government agencies at the federal and state level and private sector entities established rules or procedures that discriminate against Scientology as an organization and/or against individual members of the Church.

Scientologists continued to report instances of societal and governmental discrimination.

At the end of the reporting period, the Higher Administrative Court of Berlin-Brandenburg was considering an earlier ruling of the Berlin Administrative Court of February 27, 2009, which ordered the immediate removal of two anti-Scientology posters. The posters were placed by the Charlottenburg District Office of the Berlin City Administration in front of the Church of Scientology of Berlin on January 22, 2009, and detailed a large "STOP" sign followed by a "warning" from the Charlottenburg District Assembly about the activities of Scientology in the area. In reaching its conclusions, the lower court held that the City of Berlin had violated its duty of religious neutrality and its obligation to remain objective on religious matters. The Court also ruled that the City's warning campaign served no justifiable purpose. The Higher Court affirmed the rights of Scientologists and the Church of Scientology Berlin to freedom of religion under Article 4 of the Constitution.

In December 2008 a contract for pianist and Scientologist Cyprien Katsaris to perform at the arts festival "European Weeks" in the city hall of the city of Passau in Bavaria in June 2009 was cancelled. The private organizer of the event was "tipped off" by the Bavarian OPC that Katsaris was a Scientologist. The Bavarian OPC recommended that Katsaris be forced to sign a "sect filter." After Katsaris refused to sign the sect filter, the contract for his performance was cancelled.

On September 4, 2008, the head of the Hamburg Interior Ministry's Working Group on Scientology (AGS), Ursula Caberta, hosted a seminar entitled "That is Scientology! Reports from the U.S.A." The audience of 130 was mainly comprised of representatives from ministries throughout the country as well as a sizeable group of masked anti-Scientology activists from the group Anonymous. A small group of Scientologists demonstrated in front of the building against the event but were denied entry despite attempting to register prior to the public event.

On December 22, 2008, the Bavarian Administrative Court confirmed the February 26, 2008 city of Munich decision to revoke the permit for a kindergarten operated by Scientologists. The Administrative Court argued that it could not exclude the possibility of damage to the children due to Scientology's educational measures. The city had based its decision on the OPC view that children were being indoctrinated in Scientology. The Bavarian State Youth Office also found that the well-being of the children was at risk due to the school's educational methods.

A large number of Muslim organizations, including some that profess to be engaged in specifically and solely peaceful religious, social, and/or cultural activities were under observation by state and federal OPCs.

On September 1, 2008, the Federal Interior Ministry introduced a nationwide naturalization test. The Central Council of Muslims welcomed it, since it ended earlier state attempts to include questions on morals and social values, which had been seen as discriminating against Muslims. According to the census bureau, the number of immigrants naturalized in 2008 dropped to 94,500, about 18,600 (16%) fewer than in 2007, when 113,000 people became citizens. This was the lowest outcome since the country's reunification.

Muslim teachers wearing headscarves continued to be a concern, as several states ban public school teachers from wearing headscarves.

In January 2009 state school administrators in Rhineland-Palatinate, where headscarves for civil servants are not banned, rescinded a job offer to a Muslim

schoolteacher in Worms after learning she would wear her headscarf while teaching.

In January 2009 the Federal Court in Leipzig rejected the appeal of a March 2008 ruling by the Baden-Wuerttemberg Higher Administrative Court in Mannheim that a Muslim elementary-school teacher in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt must remove her headscarf during class. She was considering taking her case to the Federal Constitutional Court.

The headscarf ban case of Maryam Brigitte Weiss, the First Deputy Chairperson of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, was pending with the Higher Administrative Court in Muenster at the end of the reporting period. In August 2007 the Düsseldorf Administrative Court dismissed a petition by Weiss against the headscarf ban in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW).

There also remained areas where the law and Islamic practices conflicted with one another, such as the call to prayer, Islamic ritual slaughtering, and the segregation of older boys and girls during sports classes.

In May 2009 the Higher Administrative Court of Münster ruled in an expedited proceeding that a Muslim couple is not entitled to request dispensation from swim classes for their daughter. The court determined that it is reasonable that a girl of school age wear adequate clothing to reconcile the conflict of belief without gender separation.

In August 2008 the local administration of the Lahn-Dill district limited a Muslim butcher to the kosher butchering of 700 animals, down from 3,500. The butcher suspected that authorities were trying to prevent Islamic ritual slaughtering.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Chancellor Merkel accompanied U.S. President Barack Obama to the former concentration camp at Buchenwald during the President's June 5, 2009, visit. During the two-hour walking tour of Buchenwald, both commemorated the victims of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime. The event attracted broad media attention, with the country's four major TV channels (ARD, ZDF, N-TV, MDR) broadcasting the event live from Buchenwald.

On May 12, 2009, Chancellor Merkel officially welcomed a group of 16 newly naturalized immigrants in a ceremony at the Federal Chancellery, the first time in the history of the Federal Republic that a Chancellor had hosted such an event.

The Government promoted tolerance by establishing dialogues with representatives of immigrant and Muslim groups on the integration of minorities and immigrants and on Islamic matters at the Chancellor and Interior Minister levels. On July 12, 2007, the Government adopted the National Integration Plan, in which state and local authorities, representatives of minority groups, and the Government adopted measures and voluntary commitments relating to integration. The Government released a progress report on November 6, 2008, which was met with praise and criticism. The Federal Interior Ministry held its fourth and final plenary of the Islam Conference on June 25, 2009, which was generally praised by Muslim participants for promoting dialogue between the Government and the Muslim communities (see Section II). The Chancellery held a breakfast for the Conference participants at which Chancellor Merkel highlighted the importance of the Conference's work.

The Lower Saxony Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) has a touring exhibition on integration entitled "Muslims in Lower Saxony: Problems and Perspectives of Integration." It can be requested by municipalities and institutions in Lower Saxony and will be displayed at multiple destinations throughout the state through 2010.

On September 22, 2008, Baden-Wuerttemberg became the first state government in the country to host an Iftar. State Secretary and Chancery Head Hubert Wicker hosted the event, which the Religious Affairs Department (Kirchenbeauftragte) organized. Twenty German-Turkish community leaders, law enforcement officials, and a representative from the U.S. consulate in Frankfurt attended the event.

Hesse sponsors and is home to several interreligious federations, including the Intercultural Council (Interkultureller Rat), which promotes dialogue between

native and nonnative residents, and the multifaith Religious Council, which seeks to improve sensitivity to religious needs, such as in hospitals. The city of Offenbach, Hesse, is also sponsoring orientation classes in the country's language for local imams, who want to better integrate into society and help local Muslims to do the same.

The Government monitored right-wing extremists, conducted investigations into anti-Semitic crimes, and at times banned extremist groups deemed a threat to public order. On March 31, 2009, the Federal Interior Ministry banned the rightist extremist youth association "Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend." Within the framework of apolitical leisure events, the association was spreading racist and national socialist ideas among children and adolescents. Authorities sought to address right-wing extremism by conducting a variety of education programs to promote tolerance, many focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

On October 12, 2008, the Federal Interior Ministry banned Al Manar TV, a television station located in Beirut that also broadcasts in the country. Al Manar is considered similar to Hezbollah and was banned due to its distribution of anti-Semitic propaganda.

Authorities strongly condemned all anti-Semitic acts and devoted significant resources to investigating incidents and prosecuting perpetrators. The state also provided 24-hour police protection at synagogues and many other Jewish institutions.

On November 4, 2008, the Bundestag passed a resolution addressing anti-Semitism in which it called upon the Government to create an experts group to coordinate government activities to combat anti-Semitism and provide routine reports and an action plan to address the issue. The NGOs called for the swift implementation of the resolution expressing their concern that if the experts group is not created prior to the September 27 national elections, it may never happen and practical measures would be long delayed. Responding to the criticism, a Federal Interior Ministry spokesperson argued that the working group could be established during the current legislature period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, and practice.

In 2008 the federal OPC recorded 19,894 right-wing "politically motivated crimes" (PMCs) with extremist background (increase of 15.8 percent compared to 2007), which included 1,042 violent crimes (increase of 6.3 percent compared to 2007). The Federal Criminal Investigation Office (BKA) defines PMCs as offenses related to the victims' ideology, nationality, ethnicity, race, skin color, religion, worldview, ancestry, sexual orientation, disability status, parents, or social status. The 2008 OPC report included 3,124 left-wing PMCs, 1,312 PMCs by foreigners, and 275 other types of PMCs. The report listed 156 right-wing extremist organizations and groups (180 in 2007). Authorities estimated membership in these groups, plus right-wing extremists who remained unorganized, to be approximately 30,000.

A degree of anti-Semitism based on religious doctrines and historic anti-Jewish prejudice continued to exist. Far-right political organizations claimed that Jews were the cause of modern social and economic trends, such as globalization, which some of the country's citizens find disorienting or dangerous. While most anti-Semitic acts were attributed to neo-Nazi or other right-wing extremist groups or persons, recent anti-Semitic incidents indicated that Muslim youths were increasingly involved in attacks on and harassment of Jews.

Preliminary reporting from the first quarter of 2009 by the Interior Ministry indicated that there were a total of 315 anti-Semitic offenses.

According to the 2008 OPC report, the total number of registered anti-Semitic crimes dropped from 1,541 in 2007 to 1,477 in 2008 (a 4.2 percent decrease). Among these, the number of violent crimes dropped from 59 to 44. Federal authorities generally responded to combat anti-Semitic offenses. According to preliminary figures provided by the Federal Interior Ministry to the federal parliament, authorities identified 621 suspects and made eight arrests in 2008, compared to 504 suspects and 26 arrests in 2007. There were 36 injuries in 2008, an increase of 13 from the previous year.

On January 13, 2009, a Palestinian used an iron bar to attack a police officer guarding a synagogue in Berlin, saying he wanted to protest Israel's action in Gaza. The policeman had to be hospitalized; a colleague was slightly injured. The suspect was arrested.

On March 23, 2009, anti-Semitic graffiti were found on houses and walls in Magdeburg.

On March 7, 2009, during a soccer game between Sportverein (SV) Schott Jena and Fussballsportverein (FSV) Wacker 90 Nordhausen, Nordhausen fans made "Jew-Jena"-calls. They spit at players and showed the Nazi salute.

In March 2009 a large swastika and another symbol, used by the Schutzstaffel (SS), a special unit of the Nazi era, were discovered on the wall of a lecture auditorium at a college in Berlin. Smaller symbols associated with the Nazi regime were found on a table.

On February 25, 2009, unknown persons in the city of Bergen set a swastika on fire and placed it on a church wall. The city of Bergen is in the north of the former concentration camp Bergen-Belsen.

On February 19, 2009, two persons were apprehended while painting right-wing extremist slogans on a memorial for deported victims of the Nazi regime in Erfurt.

On January 10, 2009, rooms of the state patent office in Ilmenau were vandalized and painted with anti-Semitic slogans. The office chief is also the vice chairperson of the Jewish state community of Thuringia.

On December 26, 2008, a Jewish student in Pforzheim was harassed by classmates who shouted anti-Semitic slogans in front of his home and urinated on his front door. The Jewish student, who had been harassed by the group for many weeks, later left school. The Pforzheim prosecutor's office was investigating the incident, and two students who participated were expelled from school.

On December 14, 2008, a person insulted a man with anti-Semitic remarks and physically injured him seriously. Police arrested the suspect.

On November 9, 2008, representatives of the Jewish Community in Villingen-Schwenningen and the Schwarzwald-Baar County decided not to participate in Kristallnacht commemorations after receiving threatening letters. The letters featured calls to ban all Jewish organizations in the country, and one contained a swastika.

On November 2, 2009, two men harassed a Berlin orthodox Rabbi (Director of Chabad Lubavitch) and an accompanying group of eight rabbinical students from the United States and England. The rabbi and his group were driving in their van on a main street in Berlin-Charlottenburg when another car with two young men drove up closely, chased the van, and forced the van to brake sharply numerous

times. While doing this, the two car occupants shouted offensive and threatening anti-Semitic slogans. According to police reports, two suspects confessed to committing the attack. After the police had identified one suspect, his younger companion turned himself in. Both offenders were from families with immigrant background (one from Lebanon).

On October 13, 2008, at a church in Kamenz, Saxony, unknown persons removed and stole a commemorative plaque for chaplain Bernhard Wensch, who died in the Dachau concentration camp.

The most widespread anti-Semitic acts were the desecration of Jewish cemeteries or other monuments with graffiti that included the use of swastikas. In 2008 there were 53 cases of desecration of Jewish cemeteries.

On March 23, 2009, vandals desecrated the Jewish community cemetery in Meiningen, knocking over gravestones and damaging the fencing.

On January 25, 2009, 11 gravestones at the Jewish cemetery in the Eastern Town of Schwedt Oder (Brandenburg) were overturned.

On November 17, 2008, the entrance of a Jewish cemetery in Gotha was desecrated when an unknown perpetrator stuck a bloody pig's head into a Star of David in the middle of the gate. Next to the head, the unknown offenders also placed a white piece of cloth with an inscription in red denying the killing of Jews during the Holocaust. In addition, a red liquid was spilled over the gate of the cemetery.

On July 28, 2008, unknown persons defiled several graves and knocked over 13 gravestones in Cottbus.

Previously unreported and outside the reporting period, on June 26, 2008, unknown persons painted a swastika on the walls of a Jewish cemetery in Magdeburg. Also in June 2008 and previously unreported, the Jewish cemetery in Hachenburg, Rhineland-Palatinate was desecrated. Eight tombstones were destroyed.

On March 11, 2009, the Potsdam District Court sentenced neo-Nazi Horst Mahler to five years and two months of imprisonment for incitement to hatred. On February 24, 2009, a Munich court had already convicted Mahler to six years of imprisonment for continued denial of the Holocaust.

On February 13, 2009, approximately 6,000 neo-Nazis attended a "funeral march" in Dresden on the occasion of the city's air raid in 1945. It was the biggest rally in the country's post-war history and took place under the protest of up to 1,200 counter-demonstrators. After the rallies, counter-demonstrators were attacked by Neo-Nazis at a rest area along a nearby highway.

The rise of a substantial Muslim minority at times continued to lead to social conflict with religious, ethnic, and cultural overtones. Commonly, this included local resistance to mosque construction, leasing land for Muslim cemeteries, or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call believers to prayer. Authorities argued that many disputes also appeared to be related to compliance with construction and zoning laws; private groups (with some Interior Ministry financing) sought to better educate Muslim groups about these laws. Muslim groups, however, argued that such rules were often abused or that local opposition was motivated by anti-Muslim bias. Noise and traffic levels as well as security concerns were also factors in neighborhood disputes.

On February 13, 2009, the Hamburg District Court found German-Afghan Ahmad-Sobair Obeidi guilty of murdering his sister Morsal and sentenced him to life imprisonment (15 years). Obeidi stabbed his sister 23 times on May 15, 2008, out of anger over her "western" lifestyle. During the trial, the defendant stated that in his view, his sister turned away from her family, dressed inappropriately in public, and worked as a prostitute.

At the end of the reporting period, controversy over the construction of a new mosque in Cologne, in NRW, continued to receive national and international attention. The proposed new mosque, in addition to being the country's largest, would also house the national headquarters of the DITIB, the country's biggest Muslim umbrella organization with close ties to (and controlled by) the Turkish government agency for religious affairs in Ankara, Diyanet. Cologne's City Council voted in August 2008 to approve construction.

On May 9, 2009, the right-wing-populist civil movement "Pro Köln" held an "Anti-Islam-Congress," which took place against massive opposition of counter-demonstrators, political parties, churches, labor unions and other associations. Courts upheld a police ordinance denying "Pro Köln's" request to demonstrate in front of the Cologne Cathedral or at the site of the future DITIB mosque, offering

instead a site across the Rhine. The police prevented clashes by ensuring strict geographic separation between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators.

On April 22, 2009, the city of Munich approved the construction of a mosque in Sendling, but its completion in the planned form appeared unlikely due to financial difficulties and matters internal to the planning body, DITIM. Local opposition had delayed plans to build a new mosque in Sendling, even though the mayor and the Catholic Church across the street from the building site supported its construction. On February 13, 2007, the Bavarian Administrative Court upheld the decision by the Government of Upper Bavaria, pending modifications to the design of the mosque. In 2006 the government of Upper Bavaria had revoked the preliminary permit from the city due to complaints from neighbors that the mosque as planned did not fit into the architectural style of the neighborhood.

On March 22, 2009, unknown perpetrators attacked a mosque in Stadtallendorf in Hesse, throwing two bottles containing flammable substances that failed to explode against the building. According to press reports, gunshots were fired at the mosque. No one was injured and the attack caused only minor property damage. Elsewhere in Hesse, the construction of a third mosque in Frankfurt was generating calls from local officials for a citywide development plan for mosque construction.

Police concluded that the Worker's Party of Kurdistan (PKK) supporters committed the October 18 attack on a travel agency and grocery store at Hamburg DITIB. During the attack, the windows of both locations were destroyed and the grocery store burst into flames. In September, DITIB received right-wing extremist letters, which originally led authorities to believe that the attack was motivated by anti-Muslim views. Police had identified the source of the letters as a mentally disturbed individual who regularly sends such letters to government institutions. However, the police later found online that PKK supporters had claimed responsibility for the attack.

By contrast, on October 26, 2008, in NRW, a mosque in Duisburg, the country's largest mosque, was inaugurated and constructed without controversy.

The Berlin-Heinersdorf Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque was successfully completed and inaugurated on October 16, 2008.

The Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church continued publicly to oppose Scientology. Evangelical "Commissioners for Religious and Ideological Issues," also known as "sect commissioners," were particularly active in this regard.

Additionally, several public and private organizations continued to issue public warnings about Scientology afterschool study programs. The sect commissioners investigate "sects, cults, and psycho-groups" and publicize what they consider to be the dangers of these groups to the public. Evangelical sect commissioners were especially active in their efforts to warn the public about alleged dangers posed by the Unification Church, Scientology, Bhagwan-Osho, Transcendental Meditation, and Universal Life. Print and Internet literature of the sect commissioners portrayed these groups very unfavorably.

The Universal Life group reported that sect commissioner portrayals of the group promoted intolerance and that these portrayals were frequently taken up by the media and municipal authorities, who then denied members of the group access to market stands and sales booths in municipal facilities, lecture halls, and information stands in public places.

Scientologists in Hamburg continued to report discrimination due to the use of "sect filters," stating that the Federal Employment Office (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) continued to use "filters," as did many small and medium-sized businesses. The Hamburg Chamber of Commerce continued to use the "filter" in its mediation department.

Since the 1990s, four of the major political parties (the Christian Democratic Union, the Christian Social Union, the Social Democratic Party, and the Free Democratic Party) have banned Scientologists from party membership. Scientologists have unsuccessfully challenged these bans in courts.

In April 2009 several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) started a campaign to encourage young voters to counter right-wing extremism, with the goal of keeping the National Democratic Party of Germany out of the parliament. The project focused on providing financial assistance up to \$347 (€250) for every individual campaign project. Jewish NGOs, such as the Central Council of Jews, provided input and assistance on a variety of government-sponsored tolerance-education programs focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The country is one of the most active members of the 25-country Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and engages in activities that promote a

more positive attitude toward the Muslim community. The U.S. Mission has extensive contact with religious groups and meets frequently at multiple levels with representatives of religious groups to discuss their situation and concerns. The Mission has an active Muslim engagement program that includes student and other exchanges, outreach efforts, and speakers. The Embassy and consulates hosted Iftars and interfaith events to which government officials were invited, thereby encouraging greater dialogue. There have also been mission-wide meetings with prominent leaders from the Muslim communities throughout Germany, including from the Interior Ministry's Islam Conference, which provided opportunities to discuss relevant issues.

In response to anti-Semitic crimes, members of the U.S. Embassy closely followed the Government's responses and expressed the U.S. Government's opposition to anti-Semitism. Mission officers maintained contact with Jewish groups and continued to monitor closely the incidence of anti-Semitic activity. The U.S. Mission promoted religious tolerance by hosting an interfaith Seder to which government representatives as well as prominent members of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities were invited.

The U.S. Government expressed concern regarding infringement of individual rights because of affiliation with Scientology and other minority religious groups, and requested that the Government implement or encourage states to apply immediately all prior court rulings in favor of minority religious groups. For example, on March 18, 2009, Embassy representatives met with Berlin local government officials to address the Berlin district government's placement of an advertising pillar with two placards saying "Stop Scientology" directly in front of the Church's headquarters. Embassy representatives told the officials that the placards were discriminatory.

GHANA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 238,538 square miles and a population of 22 million. According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 15.6 percent is Muslim, 8.5 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs, and 6.9 percent is classified as other religious groups, which includes those who profess no religious beliefs. The Muslim community disputed these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is substantially larger.

Christian groups include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, F'eden, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostals, Baptist, African independent churches, the Society of Friends (Quakers), and numerous charismatic religious groups.

Several Islamic traditions are present in the country: Orthodox Sunni, Ahmadi, the Tijani and Qadiriyya orders of Sufi, and a small number of Shi'a.

Indigenous religious groups include Afrikania. Other religious groups include the Baha'i, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Shintoist, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, and Rastafarian. There are also some syncretistic groups that combine

elements of Christianity and Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is not a significant link between ethnicity and religion; however, geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of the Muslim population resides in northern areas as well as in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of indigenous religious beliefs reside in rural areas. Christians live throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Government employees, including the President, are required to swear an oath upon taking office. The oath can be either religious or secular, depending on the preference of the individual.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

There is no government body that regulates or oversees religious affairs, as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions must register with the Registrar General's Department to receive formal government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There were no reports that the Government denied registration to any group. Most indigenous religious groups, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, did not register.

The Government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income; however, religious organizations are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generate income.

The Ministry of Education includes religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum.

The Government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions Christian and Muslim prayers are used; occasionally there are indigenous invocations. Throughout the reporting period, the President and Vice-President made public remarks about the importance of peaceful religious coexistence. President Mills received delegations of Christian and Muslim leaders soon after assuming office in January 2009 and called for the creation of national days of prayer for both Christians and Muslims.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Traditional village authorities and families continued to banish rural women, often older women and widows, for suspected witchcraft. Fellow villagers identified these women as the cause of difficulties such as illness, crop failure, or financial misfortune. Many of these banished women were sent to live in "witch camps," villages in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions that are populated by suspected witches. The women did not face formal legal sanction if they returned home; however, most feared that they would be beaten or killed if they returned to their village or attempted to pursue legal action to challenge the charges against them.

Public discussion continued over religious worship versus indigenous practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. Some religious leaders actively advocated tolerance toward other religious groups and discouraged religiously motivated violence, discrimination, and harassment; others, particularly laypersons associated with evangelical groups, continued to preach intolerance for other groups such as Muslims and indigenous religious groups.

Some Muslims continued to feel a sense of political and social exclusion, citing token representation of Muslims in national leadership positions, the preponderance of Christian prayers in public settings, and the ubiquity of Christian slogans as contributing to this perception of marginalization and discrimination within the Muslim community. However, the new administration appointed several Muslims to lead ministries, and all the major political parties campaigned actively in Muslim communities during the 2008 electoral season.

Government agencies, such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, continued to campaign against Trokosi, a practice in the Volta region of pledging youth (commonly young females) to extended service at indigenous shrines. Afrikania and other supporters of traditional African religious groups continued to accuse human rights NGOs of misrepresenting their beliefs and regarded government and NGO campaigns against Trokosi as religious persecution.

There were high incidences of human rights abuses at prayer camps, typically Pentecostal, where persons, often with mental illness, were chained up for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water in the name of removing evil spirits. Reports indicated that these practices extended to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, Volta, and Brong Ahafo regions. Mental health care is limited in the country; families, especially in rural communities, have few options for obtaining appropriate care.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The Embassy administered the Youth Exchange and Study program, which allows 25 students to study in the United States and whose program goals include promoting religious pluralism. The Embassy also sent one person to visit the

United States on an International Visitor Leadership Program to learn about interfaith dialogue.

GREECE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, non-Orthodox groups sometimes faced administrative obstacles or encountered legal restrictions on religious practices. The Constitution and law prohibit proselytizing and stipulate that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles. No new "house of prayer" permits have been issued since 2006. Overall, there was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion by fellow citizens or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation. The number of anti-Semitic incidents increased after Israeli military action in Gaza in December 2008.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 50,502 square miles and a population of 11.2 million. The Government does not keep statistics on religious groups. An estimated 97 percent of the population identifies itself as Greek Orthodox. The remaining 3 percent is comprised of Muslims, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Old Calendarist Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Scientologists, Baha'is, Hare Krishna devotees, and followers of polytheistic Hellenic religions.

The majority of noncitizen residents and immigrants are not Greek Orthodox. Among migrants, the largest religious groups are Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant and their adherents reside largely in Athens. An officially recognized Muslim minority of 100,000 to 120,000 members resides in Thrace. The Muslim

community in Athens has a population of more than 200,000 and is composed primarily of migrants from the Middle East and South Asia.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice. Some religious groups faced administrative restrictions on forming legally recognized religious organizations or operating places of worship. The Constitution and law prohibit proselytizing.

The Government financially supports the Orthodox Church; for example, the Government pays for the salaries and religious training of clergy and finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings. The Government also pays the salaries and some expenses of the three official Muslim religious leaders (muftis) and 183 imams in Thrace and provides a small monthly allowance to other imams in Thrace. No other religious group receives governmental financial assistance. Some groups, such as the Jewish community, have requested equal treatment with the Orthodox Church on this issue.

The Government recognizes the canon law of the Orthodox Church, both within the Church and in areas of civil law such as marriage. The Orthodox Church, Jews, and Muslims are the only religious groups deemed to be "legal entities of public law," able to own, bequeath, and inherit property and appear in court under their own names as religious organizations. Other religious organizations may be registered as "legal entities of private law," which cannot own "houses of prayer" or other property directly as religious entities but must create other corporate legal entities in order to own, bequeath, or inherit property, or to appear in court. To be recognized as a "legal entity of private law," a religious group must be a "known religion" or dogma. Court rulings require "known religions" to have publicly taught doctrine with rites of worship that are open to the public, to be nonprofit in nature, to not affect public order or morality adversely, and to have a clear hierarchy of religious authorities. The Ministry of Education and Religion recognizes groups as "known religions" by issuing them "house of prayer" permits. A religious group recognized as a "known religion" is protected by the Constitution. Some religious groups such as Roman Catholics, Pentecostals,

Baha'is, Methodists, Mormons, evangelicals, and Jehovah's Witnesses are recognized as "known religions." Other groups, such as Scientologists, Hare Krishna devotees, and polytheistic Hellenic religious groups have applied for but not received recognition as "known religions." No new religious groups have been recognized by the Ministry of Education and Religion since 2006.

In March 2008 the Ministry of Education and Religion adopted new requirements for religious groups applying for new "house of prayer" permits to build or operate a religious venue. According to the new requirements, applicants must receive certification from the local Urban Planning Department attesting that a place of worship meets city planning regulations and "requirements for safe congregation." Many religious groups consider the new requirements as additional administrative obstacles to freedom of religious worship and as unfounded in law. As of the end of the reporting period, no religious group had yet received a "house of prayer" permit under the new requirements.

Some religious groups face additional legal and administrative burdens because they cannot function as legal entities. Scientologists and members of ancient polytheistic Hellenic religious groups practice their faiths as registered nonprofit civil law organizations, but without "house of prayer" permits. Without the recognition afforded by such permits, weddings officiated by religious leaders are not legally recognized. The Baha'is and members of other religious groups have expressed a desire to operate within a legal framework as fully recognized religions, rather than as private associations.

The law punishes "whoever intentionally incites others to actions that could provoke discrimination, hatred, or violence against persons or groups of persons on the basis of their race or ethnic origin or expresses ideas insulting to persons or to groups of persons because of their race or ethnic origin."

The Greek Helsinki Monitor and the Central Board of Jewish Communities brought charges against the newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* and former Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) party candidate Kostas Plevris for racism and anti-Semitism. On December 4, 2007, *Eleftheros Kosmos* was acquitted, but the court convicted Plevris and sentenced him to a 14-month suspended sentence for inciting hatred and racial violence through his book *The Jews--The Whole Truth*. The book denied the Holocaust took place and called Jewish people "mortal enemies" and "subhuman." Plevris appealed his sentence, and on March 27, 2009, an appeals court declared him innocent of all charges, concluding that the accused "did not aim at the Jews because of their racial and ethnic origin but, primarily, because of

their pursuits [in seeking] world domination [and] the methods they use in order to fulfill their conspiratorial activity." Local and international Jewish and human rights organizations criticized the decision. A spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Plevris' views did not represent the beliefs or feelings of Greeks and branded them as "insulting to the Greek people." An assistant prosecutor of the Supreme Court filed an appeal against the acquittal verdict on July 1, 2009. The appeal is "in favor of the Law," and not aimed at the specific verdict that absolved Plevris. A hearing on this latest appeal was not scheduled but was expected in fall 2009.

Roman Catholic churches and related religious bodies established prior to 1946 are legally recognized as private entities, but Catholic institutions built since 1946 are not extended the same recognition. Since 1999 the Catholic Church has unsuccessfully sought government recognition of its canon law. In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Religion established a committee to propose a legislative arrangement for the legal status of the Catholic Church. According to Catholic Church leaders, this committee has not met since February 2007. During the reporting period, Catholic Church leaders also complained that funds promised by the Government for repairing the Catholic Cathedral of Athens, damaged in a 1998 earthquake, were still not forthcoming. Church leaders noted that funds for repairing the Greek Orthodox cathedral had already been disbursed.

Leaders of non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that taxes on their organizations were discriminatory because the Government subsidizes Orthodox Church activities and Orthodox religious instruction in public schools. It remains unclear whether laws giving preferential tax treatment to the Orthodox Church apply also to other religious groups.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany Day, Clean Monday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Spirit Day, the Assumption of Mary, and Christmas Day.

The law provides for alternative forms of mandatory national service for religious and ideological conscientious objectors. Conscientious objectors may, in lieu of mandatory military service, work in state hospitals or municipal and public services for twice the length of military service minus one month, typically 23 months.

Mandatory military service is three months for "repatriated" citizens (those who emigrated from the former communist bloc and are of Greek ethnic background)

and five months of alternative service for repatriated conscientious objectors. Repatriated conscientious objectors who have in the past completed military service in their country of origin but became conscientious objectors later in life are ineligible for alternative service. Those who became conscientious objectors after they performed their military service and were placed on reservist lists do not have their objector status recognized. Several cases involving such conscientious objectors were pending before the Council of State, but were dropped after a change to the law exempted persons over 35 years of age from conscription.

Orthodox religious instruction in public primary and secondary schools, at government expense, is mandatory for all Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students may exempt themselves. However, schools offer no alternative activity or religious instruction for these children.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives the Muslim minority in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations called wakfs, allows muftis to render religious judicial services (under Islamic law, Shari'a) in the area of family and inheritance law, and provides the right to Turkish-language education. Thrace has secular bilingual schools and two Muslim religious schools funded by the state. The Government gives special consideration to Muslim minority students from Thrace for admission to technical institutes and universities, setting aside 0.5 percent of the total number of places for them annually.

The Government maintains that Muslims living outside of Thrace are not covered by the Treaty of Lausanne and therefore do not enjoy those rights provided by the Treaty. Some Thracian Muslims resident in Athens have lobbied unsuccessfully for state-funded Islamic religious instruction for their children.

The Government recognizes Shari'a as the law regulating family and civic issues for Muslims who reside in Thrace. First instance courts in Thrace routinely ratified the decisions of the muftis, who have judicial powers in civil and domestic matters. The National Human Rights Committee (an autonomous body that advises the Government on human rights) stated that the Government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties and not recognize Shari'a, since it can restrict the civil rights of some citizens. In past reporting periods, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern regarding the impediments that Muslim women in Thrace face under Shari'a. In 2006 the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur for Religion or Belief reported that they were informed of cases of both early marriages and marriages by proxy.

In February 2009 two Muslim women in Thrace successfully challenged mufti decisions in Greek courts. In Komotini, a Muslim woman appealed a decision by the local mufti to give custody of two of her four children to her husband, reportedly an alcoholic suffering from psychological problems. On February 18, the Greek first instance Court of Rodopi overturned the mufti's decision and gave the woman custody of all four children. In Xanthi a woman filed a lawsuit against the local mufti, who had awarded her former husband custody of their child despite a signed private agreement allowing her to retain custody. A court overturned the mufti's decision and awarded custody to the woman.

On divorce, Muslim female activists claimed that because all Muslim women in Thrace were married under Shari'a, they were obliged to acquire mufti consent to obtain a divorce. These activists noted that some interpretations of Shari'a do not exist in written form and that much of the legal code is unavailable in an official Greek translation, thus limiting women's ability to appeal mufti decisions to Greek courts.

In May 2008 the mufti of Komotini announced the start of a project to translate Shari'a family law into Greek and English. The initiative was undertaken at the request of the European Union. The translation had not been completed by the end of the reporting period.

The law requires an oath for all civil servants, including legislators, lawyers, police officers, firefighters, and soldiers, upon assumption of duties. Non-Orthodox Christians and persons not belonging to any religious group may take an oath in accord with their own beliefs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. However, the Government limits the ability of some religious groups to register or obtain legal recognition as religions. The Constitution and law prohibit proselytizing.

Jehovah's Witnesses have 12 pending "house of prayer" permit applications, some dating from 2005. As of the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Religion had not replied to repeated requests from the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Ombudsman for action on these applications.

The Church of Scientology applied for a "house of prayer" permit in 2008 but had received no response from the Ministry of Education and Religion by the end of the reporting period. In 2000 the Ministry denied the Scientologists a permit on the grounds that Scientology "is not a religion." The Church of Scientology is currently registered as a nonprofit organization.

Polytheistic Hellenic religious groups have multiple pending applications for "house of prayer" permits and have previously protested delays to the Ombudsman. In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Religion responded to one of the groups, stating that it would "delay its formal response due to the seriousness and peculiarity of the matter." The Ministry provided no further response during the reporting period.

Leaders of some religious groups wanted the Government to abolish entirely the system of "house of prayer" permits, noting that the process administratively hinders freedom of religion and that under the current legal framework, police have the authority to take unregistered religious organizations to court. During the reporting period, there were no reports of police prosecuting unregistered religious organizations in this manner.

Leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that the Athens Registrar's Office (an authority under the Ministry of Interior) stopped officially recognizing and issuing marriage certificates for some religious marriages in 2008. The Registrar's Office reportedly stated that these marriages were not officiated by ministers on an approved list at the Ministry of Education and Religion, and that the marriages were not conducted in premises with valid "house of prayer" permits. The Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that the Registrar's Office had registered their marriages since 1975 and that the change constituted a breach of freedom of religion.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Certain legal privileges granted to the Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. Orthodox officials have an exclusive institutionalized link between the church hierarchy and the Ministry of Education and Religion to handle administrative matters. Religious groups also complained that the Orthodox Church enjoys tax and fee exemptions not extended to other denominations.

In 2006 the Supreme Administrative Court dismissed on technical grounds an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses over property taxation for their headquarters.

When the area was rezoned, Orthodox Church properties were exempt from rezoning fees; the Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that, as a "recognized religion," they should also be exempt. The case was pending in court at the end of the reporting period.

Members of the Muslim minority in Thrace were underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to officer ranks. In 2008 the Government passed legislation establishing a new program to assign 0.5 percent of civil service jobs to Muslims. In the fall of 2008, as part of this program, seven members of the Muslim minority were appointed as career soldiers in the army. Two members of the Muslim minority from Thrace held seats in Parliament. In Xanthi and Komotini, Muslims held seats on the prefectural and town councils and served as local mayors. Municipalities in Thrace hired Muslims as public liaisons in citizen service centers and provided Turkish lessons for other civil servants.

Differences remained between some members of the Muslim minority community and the Government over the process of selecting muftis and imams. Under existing law, the Government appoints all three muftis in Thrace to 10-year terms of office, in consultation with a committee of Muslim leaders. The Government maintained that it reserved the right to appoint muftis since they enjoy a state salary and perform judicial Shari'a functions as well as religious duties. Some members of the Muslim minority objected to the fact that the Government was not bound by the recommendations of the selection committee.

While some members of the Muslim minority accepted the authority of the government-appointed muftis, others elected two unofficial muftis to serve their communities, objecting that the government of a non-Islamic country had no right to appoint muftis. These two muftis are not recognized by the Government, and as such do not have the civil authority to perform weddings and divorces or make rulings on family legal matters such as inheritance rights. Government courts previously prosecuted the unofficial muftis for usurping the functions of the official, appointed muftis. In July 2006 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that these prosecutions violated the rights of the elected mufti of Xanthi. Some members of the Muslim minority continued to lobby the Government to allow the direct election of muftis.

The Government took steps to address controversy over the management and taxation of wakfs in Thrace. In the past, some Muslim activists sought the right for wakfs to be self-governed and to enjoy tax-free status. In 2007 the Government

passed legislation allowing wakf management committees to be directly elected and writing off all tax liens against the wakfs, amounting to approximately \$9.1 million (6.5 million euro). However, wakf elections did not take place during the reporting period, and the tax write-off had not been finalized.

The Muslim community in Athens is demographically distinct from the officially recognized Muslim minority in Thrace and has an estimated population of more than 200,000, composed primarily of migrants from the Middle East and South Asia. During the reporting period, Muslim leaders in Athens stated that their biggest complaints were the continued absence of an official mosque or recognized Muslim clergy, and the lack of an Islamic cemetery.

Despite parliamentary approval nine years ago for the establishment of an official mosque, construction had not started. In 2000 Parliament approved a bill permitting construction of a combined mosque and Islamic cultural center. In 2006 Parliament passed legislation providing for the establishment of a mosque, without a cultural center, in the central Athens neighborhood of Votanikos, on a plot of land owned by the Ministry of Defense and occupied by naval facilities. Muslim leaders expressed satisfaction with the proposed location, but in October 2007 they requested quicker action from the Minister of Education and Religion, calling the mosque issue "one of grave importance" to the Muslim community. In May 2009, in response to a parliamentary inquiry, the Ministry of Defense stated that it was unable to vacate the land designated for the mosque, claiming that relocating the naval facilities would cost \$128 million (91.25 million euro), and that it did not have sufficient funding to do so.

Due to the lack of an official mosque or clerics in Athens, Muslims living in Athens or other areas outside of Thrace had to travel to Thrace or go abroad in order to have official Islamic marriages or funerals. Those who could not afford the expense of travel had unrecognized religious rites.

Muslims in Athens also complained about the continued lack of an Islamic cemetery in Athens, stating that municipal cemetery regulations required the exhumation of bodies after three years, and that this exhumation was a violation of Islamic religious law. In 2005 the Orthodox Church announced that it would set aside three hectares of land for an Islamic cemetery. However, construction never commenced. In May 2009, in response to a parliamentary inquiry, several government ministries provided conflicting accounts of the cemetery's status. The Ministry of Interior stated that the Athens City Planning Office was reviewing the land for suitability as a cemetery, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the

land was "not suitable for a cemetery" and that alternative options were being reviewed.

In the absence of an official mosque, Muslims throughout the country operated more than a hundred unofficial mosques and prayer rooms. The Islamic Cultural Center of Moschato, Athens, opened in 2006 and continued to operate as an unofficial mosque without a "house of prayer" permit. Some unofficial prayer rooms were ethnic-specific, serving the needs of particular Muslim migrant communities.

Cremation is prohibited by Orthodox Church tradition, and members of several religious organizations complained about the lack of crematory facilities in the country. In March 2009, the government issued a decree specifying the construction of municipal crematoria, but at the end of the reporting period no construction had begun.

The intra-Orthodox doctrinal dispute between Esphigmenou monastery and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, administrator of the region under the 1924 Charter of Mt. Athos, continued during the reporting period. Esphigmenou is an Old Calendarist monastery that ceased recognizing the authority of the Patriarchate in 1972. According to the Political Governor of the Mt. Athos region, monasteries must recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate's authority in order to operate. As a result, the Patriarchate requested the eviction of the monks, which was upheld by a Supreme Court ruling in 2003 but never implemented. The monks appealed the ruling, but in 2005 the Council of State declined to rule on the appeal on the grounds that it was not competent, under the Constitution, to judge the ecclesiastic and administrative jurisdiction of the Patriarchate over Mt. Athos. Some Old Calendarist monks continued to occupy the monastery without legal access to the bank accounts and other assets of the monastery.

In late 2005 the Holy Community governing Mt. Athos appointed a new Esphigmenou monastic order, officially recognized by the Patriarchate, to replace the existing order. In late 2006 seven monks were injured in clashes between the two monastic orders; the police did not intervene. In November 2008 six Esphigmenou monks convicted of disturbing the peace and illegally occupying the monastery were acquitted by the Thessaloniki Court of Appeals. Members of the officially recognized order, who were temporarily residing at another monastery, criticized the continued presence of the Old Calendarist monks at Esphigmenou as illegal. Supporters of the incumbent monks claimed that the Government has prevented food, medicine, medical personnel, and pilgrims from reaching the

monastery. The Governing Authority of Mt. Athos stated that it was in regular contact with the Old Calendarist monks and was trying to find a solution to better integrate them with the rest of the Mt. Athos monastic community.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Leaders from some religious groups expressed concern that antiproselytizing laws remained on the books.

In June 2008 a member of an evangelical church was detained briefly and subsequently charged with one count of proselytism for distributing Bible materials. A first instance court dismissed the charge.

On January 20, 2008, police arrested and detained two Mormon missionaries for two days on charges of proselytizing. The missionaries were subsequently tried and acquitted of all charges.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In February 2009 the Government cosponsored commemorative events in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, and Volos for Holocaust Remembrance Day. Government ministers, Members of Parliament, and mayors attended the events, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a public statement. On June 17, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a book, *Greeks in Auschwitz-Birkenau*, and held a public event in remembrance of Greeks killed in Nazi concentration camps.

The Government made progress on implementing a January 2007 initiative to address concerns raised by the Muslim minority. The government plan consisted of hiring 240 imams, setting aside 0.5 percent of civil service jobs for members of the Muslim minority, and writing off tax liens on wakfs. After hiring 183 imams in January 2009, the Government began paying their salaries in March. Government officials stated that they did not hire the full 240 because the

remaining candidates could not certify that they had completed primary school. The Government started filling the 0.5 percent civil service job quota in September 2008, but officials stated that meeting the full quota would take time due to low job turnover and availability.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The number of anti-Semitic incidents increased after Israeli military action in Gaza in December 2008.

The Greek Orthodox Church exercised significant social, political, and economic influence and owned a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property. Many citizens assumed that Greek ethnicity was tied to Orthodox Christianity. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

Members of some minority religious groups reported incidents of societal discrimination and intolerance from the Orthodox Church, citing that some Orthodox bishops warned their parishioners not to associate with members of minority religious groups and requested that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. The Orthodox Church maintained on an official web site a list of 74 religious practices and groups that it considered sacrilegious, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Christians, Scientologists, Mormons, and Baha'is.

Leaders of many non-Orthodox religious groups reported that while the Orthodox Church seldom engaged in official contact with other religious groups, cordial private contacts between Orthodox Church leaders and members of minority religious groups had increased in frequency.

In December 2008, the left-of-center newspaper *Eleftherotypia* printed anti-Semitic cartoons and satire, joining smaller extremist publications that compared Jews to Nazis or held them responsible for actions of the state of Israel. In addition, the internet site Rizospastis, the official organ of the Communist Party of Greece, posted an animation that linked the Star of David with Nazi swastikas, with the slogan "imperialism dropped its mask and put out its Zionist knife."

Giorgos Karatzaferis, the party leader of LAOS, a right-wing nationalist political party with 10 parliamentary seats, has publicly stated that his party is neither racist nor anti-Semitic, but he has frequently denied that the Holocaust occurred and

accused "the Pope and the Jews" of a conspiracy against the country. After Israeli military action in Gaza in January 2009, official LAOS newspaper *Alpha Ena* published an anti-Semitic article signed by Karatzaferis stating, "it is now widely known throughout the world that the Jew stinks of blood," and linking Jews to Nazis.

Vandalism of Jewish monuments increased during and after Israeli military action in Gaza, with 13 incidents reported in December 2008 alone, compared to just two reports during the rest of the year. From December 2008 to January 2009, Jewish synagogues, Holocaust monuments, and Jewish cemeteries were desecrated with anti-Semitic graffiti in Athens, Larissa, Volos, Corfu, Veroia, Drama, Komotini, and Ioannina. In August 2008, an anti-Semitic video boasting about the vandalism of the Holocaust memorial of Rhodes was posted on the website YouTube. In May 2008, the Athens Jewish cemetery was vandalized, with one gravestone damaged and broken glass spread throughout the area. The Jewish community protested each of these incidents. The Jewish cemetery of Ioannina was vandalized in January, March, and June 2009. The Minister of Foreign Affairs publicly condemned the acts of vandalism on June 17.

The Jewish community reported that few of the publicly owned Jewish cemeteries in the country were properly maintained, stating that grass was not cut, fences were not repaired, and plants were not watered. Maintenance is required by law.

In an improvement since the last reporting period, state tourism and media agencies no longer advertized an Easter tradition involving the burning of a life-size effigy of Judas, sometimes referred to as the "burning of the Jew." This tradition continued to occur in some parts of the country but was generally labeled the "burning of Judas" instead. The Jewish community continued to protest anti-Semitic passages in the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Week liturgy. The Jewish community reported that it remained in dialogue with the Orthodox Church about the removal of these passages.

The Jewish community of Thessaloniki and the Government continued discussions to find an acceptable restitution for the community's cemetery, expropriated after its destruction during the Holocaust. Aristotle University, a public institution, was built on top of the expropriated cemetery soon after the end of World War II. An experts' committee, formed by the Ministry of Finance to evaluate the property and recommend a solution on restitution for the cemetery, met again in early March 2009. In late March and April 2009, the State Department Special Envoy for

Holocaust Issues met with Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials to urge a prompt resolution.

Representatives of international rabbinical nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed concern that subway construction in the vicinity of the University was disturbing human remains and called for a suspension of all excavation work. The director of the company overseeing subway construction told the Special Envoy that no human remains had been unearthed.

Members of the local Jewish community reported that subway authorities and government Archaeological Service staff had consulted them on any findings of human remains, although the consultation usually occurred after excavation was completed. By the end of the reporting period, 72 fragments of tombstones had been found, registered by archaeological authorities, and reviewed by members of the local Jewish community. Although local authorities did not provide absolute assurance that construction would not cross the boundaries of the cemetery, leaders of the Thessaloniki Jewish community were satisfied with the cooperation of the local authorities responsible for subway construction.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers met with religious leaders and the Minister of Education and Religion. The Ambassador and visiting senior U.S. officials discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Embassy also regularly discussed religious freedom issues with other government officials, including mayors, regional leaders, Members of Parliament, and members of other diplomatic missions. Officers from the Embassy and the consulate general in Thessaloniki met regularly with representatives of various religious groups and investigated reports of religious discrimination.

During the reporting period, Embassy officials attended Holocaust commemoration events in Athens and the consul general attended events in Thessaloniki. U.S. officers continued to actively engage the Government on the issue of compensating the Thessaloniki Jewish community for Jewish cemetery property expropriated by the Government. In March and April 2009, the State Department Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with government officials on the restitution issue to urge closer cooperation with the local Jewish community and international rabbinical groups on cemetery issues. The U.S. Government encouraged the Jewish

community in its efforts to engage Aristotle University, a public institution built on the site of the expropriated cemetery, on future projects, including memorializing the Jewish heritage of the site.

In September 2008 the Ambassador hosted an iftar dinner for religious leaders, government officials, and members of the diplomatic community to commemorate the Islamic month of Ramadan and to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Embassy actively followed legal issues relating to religious workers' visas and the legal status and taxation of religious organizations.

U.S. officials promoted and supported initiatives related to religious freedom and used the International Visitor Program to introduce Muslim community leaders to the United States and their American counterparts.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials regularly visited religious sites and conducted religious freedom outreach throughout the country.

GRENADA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, including the islands of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique, has an area of 133 square miles and in 2004 a population of 105,000. There are 96,000 persons on the island of Grenada, 8,000 on Carriacou, and 900 on Petite Martinique. According to the 2001 census, 44 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 12 percent Anglican, 11 percent Pentecostal, and 11 percent Seventh-day Adventist. Religious groups whose adherents number 2 percent or more of the population include Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of God, Baptist, and evangelical. Religious groups with 1 percent or less of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Brethren, Baha'i, Hindu, Moravian, Muslim, Rastafarian, and Salvation Army. In addition, there are small communities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Mennonites. Approximately 4 percent of the population view themselves as nonbelievers. There is one mosque. The Government does not count the 3,700 foreign university students in its census data. Reportedly, more than 60 percent of the population regularly participates in formal religious services.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 9 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship.

The Government observes Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

To qualify for customs tax exemptions, religious groups must register with the Prime Minister's Office, which is responsible for issuing licenses for religious groups, buildings, and events.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Conference of Churches Grenada facilitated closer relations among various religious organizations. Faith-based organizations continued their collaboration to repair churches damaged during the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes; none of the three main churches in St. George's that lost their roofs had succeeded in replacing them.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

GUATEMALA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 42,043 square miles and a population of 14 million. According to official census data, the indigenous population is 43 percent of the total, although unofficial estimates are higher.

There is no official census of religious affiliation. The Episcopal Conference of Guatemala, the official ruling body of the Roman Catholic Church, estimates that 65 to 70 percent of the population is Catholic (2009). Alianza Evangelica, the official umbrella organization for Protestants, estimates that 35 to 40 percent of the population is Protestant. A 2006 survey conducted by Latinobarómetro indicates that Catholics constitute 56.9 percent of the population and evangelicals 30.7 percent. The largest Protestant group is the Full Gospel Church, followed by the Assemblies of God, the Central American Church, and the Prince of Peace Church, as well as many independent evangelical groups. Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Seventh-day Adventists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses are present. Jews (approximately 2,000) and a small Muslim population reside primarily in Guatemala City.

Catholics and Protestants are distributed throughout the country, and their adherents are found among all major ethnic groups and political parties. According to leaders of Mayan spiritual organizations and Catholic and Protestant

missionaries, many indigenous Catholics and some Protestants also practice some form of indigenous spiritual ritual.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no state religion; however, article 37 of the Constitution recognizes explicitly the distinct legal personality of the Catholic Church.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter, and Christmas as national holidays. It observes the Feast of the Assumption as a local holiday in Guatemala City (the Virgin of the Assumption is the patron saint of Guatemala City).

The Government neither establishes requirements for religious recognition nor imposes registration requirements for believers to worship together. The Government requires religious organizations as well as nonreligious associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to register as legal entities in order to conduct business such as renting or purchasing premises, entering into contracts, and enjoying tax-exempt status. The Government does not charge religious groups a registration fee.

Due to its historical presence since colonial times, the Catholic Church does not have to register as a legal entity; the Constitution recognizes it as such. Any other religious group may file a copy of its bylaws and a list of its initial membership with the Ministry of Government to receive formal recognition. The group must have at least 25 initial members, and the bylaws must reflect an intention to pursue religious objectives. Applications are rejected only if the organization does not appear to be devoted to a religious objective, appears intent on undertaking illegal activities, or engages in activities that appear likely to threaten public order. There were no reports that the Government rejected any group's application during the reporting period; however, Protestant leaders alleged that they found the application process lengthy (lasting from six months to several years) and estimated that due to these bureaucratic difficulties 7,000 Protestant churches either had not applied for registration or had not completed the process.

Foreign missionaries must obtain tourist visas, which are issued for renewable periods of three months. After renewing their tourist visas once, they may apply for temporary residence. Specific missionary visas are neither issued nor required.

The Government does not subsidize religious groups. The Constitution permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. There is no national framework for determining the nature or content of this religious instruction; when provided, it tends to be programmed at the local level. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education consulted with the Catholic Church and Protestant groups on the integration of general values focusing on good citizenship, although not specific religious teachings, into school curriculums.

During the Spanish colonial period, some Catholic churches were built on sacred Mayan sites. Mayan spiritual leaders continued to use some of these locations to practice syncretic forms of worship. The law permits Mayan spirituality groups to conduct religious ceremonies at Mayan historical sites on government-owned property.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Although registered religious entities are legally exempt from taxes, Protestant leaders noted that local officials sometimes required their churches to pay property taxes.

In August 2008 the Immigration Service denied entry to Puerto Rican José Luis Miranda, who claimed to be the Antichrist and planned to participate in a conference. Immigration officials based the decision on article 29 of the Immigration Law, which grants authority to permit or deny entry to any foreigner. Miranda's church is registered and recognized by the Government and holds regular meetings in Guatemala City. In 2007 the Government also denied entry to Miranda, despite having granted him permission to enter and preach on several prior occasions since the founding of his church in Puerto Rico in 1986.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The interreligious movement focused on discussion of social questions rather than interfaith discourse. For several years, representatives of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish groups, and traditional Mayan spirituality, have participated in the Interreligious Dialogue and the Foro Guatemala to discuss social and political topics.

Evangelical Protestant churches were split between a majority group, which avoided interreligious engagement with other religious traditions, and a minority group, which actively promoted an interreligious and multicultural viewpoint.

Mayan spiritual leaders continued to note widespread disagreements with evangelical Protestants, and to a lesser extent, charismatic Catholics. Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of indigenous practices than the Catholic Church, whose approach in many areas of the country is to tolerate traditional practice not directly in conflict with Catholic dogma.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met on various occasions with leaders of major religious institutions as well as religious-based NGOs. Embassy officials promoted dialogue between leaders of diverse religious communities and Mayan and ladino groups within civil society.

GUINEA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Constitution was suspended by the military junta that took power during the December 2008 coup d'état and was not reinstated during the reporting period.

The Government, represented by the military junta effective December 23, 2008, generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Religious leaders continued to play critical roles in the national grassroots movement for constructive political change.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 94,926 square miles and a population of 10 million. Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 10 percent is Christian, and 5 percent holds indigenous religious beliefs. Muslims are generally Sunni; there are relatively few Shi'a, although they are increasing in number. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and a few evangelical groups. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among the expatriate community.

Some Muslims and Christians incorporate indigenous beliefs and rituals into their religious practices.

Muslims comprise a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the south, and in the eastern Forest Region. Christians also reside in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon region in the middle of the country, where Islam is deeply intertwined with Pular (or Fulani or Peuhl) culture and society. Indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high since traditional cultural rituals are often closely tied to religious practices.

The country's significant immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same religious beliefs as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of indigenous religious groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice. To date, protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial processes. The Constitution was suspended by the military junta that took power during the December 2008 coup d'état and was not reinstated during the reporting period.

The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic and interreligious tensions. On January 14, 2009, the junta appointed a new Secretary General and promoted the position to the cabinet level. The new Secretary General actively promoted religious tolerance and appointed six national directors to lead the offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs and the Endowment, and General Inspector.

The Government, represented by the military junta effective December 23, 2008, observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, and Christmas.

The Government continues to coordinate with the Inter-Religious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. The Secretariat invited all religious groups to participate in recent public forums addressing globalization, religion, and

other topics. The Secretariat also consulted with the Council on the management of Conakry's multid denominational cemetery.

All religious groups newly operating in the country must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs. Registration entitles religious organizations to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate; however, they were not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits available to registered groups. Also, unregistered religious groups are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. The Government did not expel any religious groups during the reporting period.

Prior to being registered by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs, all religious organizations must be approved by the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. During the reporting period, the Government stated that it registered all groups that submitted applications.

The small Baha'i community practiced its faith openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

There is a general tradition of Islamic schools throughout the country. Islamic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djalon region, which was ruled as an Islamic theocracy during the 18th century.

There are a few madrassahs across the country. The schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, other Gulf States, and Libya. The madrassahs are not formally linked with the public school system and are not recognized by the Government because they teach only Arabic and Islam. Despite ongoing efforts, the Ministry of Education has been unable to integrate the madrassahs into the government-financed "Franco-Arab" system, which offers religious instruction in addition to a curriculum comparable to the public schools.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry are government employees.

The Government prohibits ownership of private radio and television by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned commercial radio. The Government allocates time during the week for both Islamic and Christian programming on state-owned national

television, including Sunday Mass, Islamic religious instruction, and Friday prayers from the central mosque.

For the first time since independence in 1958, the country has a non-Muslim leader, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the self-proclaimed president who is Christian.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the regime during the reporting period.

Some non-Muslims claimed that the Government continued to use its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. For example, the universities close on Friday so Muslim students can go to mosque, but they schedule classes on Sunday, preventing Christian students from attending church. The Secretariat General facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for some Muslims, but did not provide any similar service to the Christian community.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, in some parts of the country, strong cultural, social, and economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam. The missionary community reported that while conversion from Islam to Christianity is allowed by the Government, it sometimes results in rejection or persecution by families and communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and senior religious leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Embassy officials raised religious freedom concerns with senior officials at the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, the senior imams of Conakry and Labe, and other religious leaders outside the capital.

GUINEA-BISSAU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 13,948 square miles and a population of 1.5 million. Approximately one-half the population follows indigenous religious practices. Of the remainder, an estimated 40-45 percent is Muslim and 5-10 percent is Christian.

Islam is practiced most widely by the Fula and Mandinka ethnic groups; Muslims generally live in the north and northeast. Virtually all Muslims are Sunni. The number of Ahmadis is extremely small and not confined to any particular geographic region. Practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs generally live in all but the northern parts of the country. Christians belong to a number of groups, including the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated in Bissau and other large towns.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government at all levels generally sought to protect this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes Christmas as a national holiday.

The Government requires that religious groups be licensed and reportedly did not refuse any applications.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since there is no U.S. Embassy in the country, the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, Senegal handles all official contact with the country.

GUYANA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 83,000 square miles and a population of 766,000. Data from a 2002 census on religious affiliation indicate that approximately 57 percent of the population is Christian, broken down as follows: 17 percent Pentecostal, 8 percent Roman Catholic, 7 percent Anglican, 5 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 20 percent other Christian groups. Approximately 28 percent of the population is Hindu, 7 percent is Muslim (mostly Sunni), and 2 percent practice other beliefs, including members of the Rastafari movement and the Baha'i Faith. An estimated 4 percent of the population does not profess any religion. Some religious groups claim higher membership than reflected by the 2002 census.

The country is ethnically diverse, reflecting East Indian, African, Chinese, and European ancestry, as well as a significant indigenous population. Most religious groups can claim membership from a cross section of ethnic groups, with two exceptions: Most Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, and nearly all Rastafarians are Afro-Guyanese.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The law protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. Members of all religious groups worshipped freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion, and the Government practiced no form of religious favoritism or discrimination.

While the Government recognizes religious groups of all faiths, they must register with the Government to receive formal recognition. Religious groups seeking to establish operations must first obtain permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. In the past, access to Amerindian areas required permission from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs; however, under the 2006 revision of the Amerindian Act, only the permission of the local village council is required. There is no formal monitoring of religious groups.

The Government observes the following national holidays: Christian--Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, and Christmas; Hindu--Phagwah (festival welcoming spring) and Diwali (festival of lights); Islamic--You-Man-Nabi (birth of the Prophet Muhammad) and Eid Al-Adha (feast of sacrifice).

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction. The Government imposes no requirements regarding religion for any official or nonofficial purposes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) makes an effort to coordinate with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major religious groups provided prayer and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons were given on GDF bases. Although no official GDF policy requires attendance at religious services, anecdotal evidence from GDF officers suggests that individual commanders required attendance at some religious programs. Membership in a particular religion did not confer any specific advantage or disadvantage; however, general military practice tended to favor Christians.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

HAITI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion, provided that these practices do not disturb law and order.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 9 million.

A U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) census released in 2006 (based on 2003 data) lists the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, and 3 percent Seventh-day Adventist. Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, and practitioners of Vodou (voodoo) are also present. An undetermined percentage of the population practices both Vodou and Christianity. Recent estimates indicate that half of the population practices Vodou, most along with other religious practices. The UNFPA reported 2.1 percent of the population practices Vodou as their primary religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion, provided that these practices do not disturb law and order.

The Constitution directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the Ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

The Government observes Good Friday, Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects their tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Goods imported for use by registered religious groups and missionaries are exempt from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Requirements for registration with the Bureau include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the Bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Although legally permitted to register, many nondenominational Christian groups and Vodou practitioners operated informally and did not seek official recognition. There were no reports of this requirement restricting the operation of a religious group.

Historically, Roman Catholicism was the official religion. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See renounced the 1860 concordat, which serves as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day; however, the Government recognizes the increasing role of Protestant churches. For example, Episcopal and other Protestant clergy were invited to participate when the religious sector was asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics. Foreign missionaries enter as regular tourists and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Delays in issuing residence permits were attributed to bureaucratic delay.

The Constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. In most Catholic or Protestant schools, school authorities require religious education but generally make provisions for students who are not affiliated with that school's denomination.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society, and citizens freely expressed their religious beliefs. Ecumenical organizations were active. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools. While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward Vodou ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. These differing perspectives led to isolated instances of conflict.

Some religious groups were politically active. One Protestant pastor led the Christian Movement for a New Haiti political party, and another led the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti political party. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political matters. On December 5, 2008, the National Confederation of Haitian Vodou held a peaceful political rally without interference.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views, including on religious freedom.

HONDURAS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of 7.8 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), 8 percent is indigenous, and the rest is principally of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent.

There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. In a 2007 nationwide survey, CID-Gallup reported that 47 percent of respondents identify themselves as Roman Catholic and 36 percent evangelical Protestant. Other sources vary. The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant groups. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The Honduran Fraternity of Evangelical Churches (CEH) represents the evangelical leadership. There are small numbers of Muslims (approximately 2,000) and Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. The Catholic Church continued developing plans with the armed forces to provide religious chaplains to the military. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions, including the National Anticorruption Commission.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas as national holidays. In 2009, the Government observed the entire week of Holy Week as a national holiday due to a presidential decree.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. The Catholic Church is the only "church" recognized under the law. Other religious groups are accorded status as "religious associations" by receiving juridical personality, which provides tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty. The Constitution provides the executive branch power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations, while new "churches" can be recognized only by an act of the National Congress. Non-Catholic religious groups, including the CEH, have petitioned Congress for recognition as "churches" but operated as religious associations while awaiting a decision.

Associations seeking juridical personality are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the CEH for review. This group may suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications are also referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president must sign the approved resolutions.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The Ministry generally grants such permits.

Under article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the Government prohibits immigration of foreign missionaries who practice religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud.

There are religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as parochial schools. They neither receive special treatment from the Government nor do they face any restrictions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Constitution stipulates that only laypersons may seek election to Congress.

On April 23, 2009, the Ministry of Justice officially banned the religious group Creciendo en Gracia (CEG) and all associated foreigners from operating in the country, declaring that CEG profited from bogus religious activities and caused public disturbances. In March 2009, members of Congress voted unanimously to ban the group. CEG was founded in Puerto Rico by José Luis Miranda, who claims to be the Antichrist and preaches against traditional organized religions.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Catholic Church designated the archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the archbishop established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section in his archdiocese. The leadership of the Catholic Church and CEH exerted significant influence over politics and society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

HONG KONG

The Basic Law, which serves as the Constitution of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Six of the largest religious groups have long collaborated on community affairs and make up a joint conference of religious leaders.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The territory has an area of 426 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland, and a population of 7 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population practices some form of religion. The two most prevalent religions are Buddhism and Taoism, which are often observed together in the same temple. According to the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), the region is home to approximately 2 million Buddhists and Taoists; 350,000 Protestant Christians; 450,000 Roman Catholics; 250,000 Muslims; 40,000 Hindus; 10,000 Sikhs; 4,600 Jehovah's Witnesses; and 4,000 Jews. Confucianism is also prevalent in the HKSAR. Although few believers practiced Confucianism as a formal religion, Confucian ideas and social tenets were often blended together with Taoism and Buddhism. There are between 300 and 500 Falun Gong practitioners in Hong Kong.

There are approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, 800 Christian churches and chapels, 5 mosques, 4 synagogues, 1 Hindu temple, and 1 Sikh temple.

There are 1,400 Protestant congregations, representing 50 denominations. The largest Protestant denomination is the Baptist Church, followed by the Lutheran Church. Other major denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans,

Christian and Missionary Alliance groups, the Church of Christ in China, Methodists, Pentecostals, and the Salvation Army. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is also present.

The Pope is recognized as the head of the Roman Catholic Church. A Bishop as well as priests, monks, and nuns serve Catholics and maintain links to the Vatican. Although still in Hong Kong, Cardinal Zen retired from his active role in the diocese. The diocese contains 52 parishes. The office of the assistant secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference is located in the HKSAR. The Catholic Church engages in a broad range of social service activities. It operates 6 hospitals, 14 clinics, 38 social centers, 18 hostels, 13 homes for the elderly, 20 rehabilitation centers, and 309 schools and kindergartens serving more than 250,000 children.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination by the HKSAR Government. Sovereignty over HKSAR was transferred from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on July 1, 1997. According to the Basic Law, the HKSAR enjoys a high degree of autonomy in the area of religious freedom under the principle of "one country, two systems." The Government does not recognize a state religion.

The Government stated that it does not discriminate against any particular religious groups, as the right to freedom of religious belief is protected under the Basic Law and the Bill of Rights. When formulating policies and providing public services, all government bodies are required under Article 32 of the Basic Law and Article 15 of the Bill of Rights to treat the public on an equal basis regardless of their religious belief. As such, the Government invited all stakeholders, including affected organizations or individuals, to provide views on proposed measures to enhance public understanding and improve the quality of those measures.

The HAB functions as a liaison between religious groups and the Government. Although there is no formal organization convened by HAB that regularly meets with religious leaders, HAB remains in contact with the communities and seeks to address concerns they may raise. The Government grants public holidays to mark special religious days on the traditional Chinese and Christian calendars, including Christmas and the birth of Buddha.

The only direct government role in managing religious affairs is the Chinese Temples Committee, which the Secretary for Home Affairs leads. Its members are appointed by the Chief Executive. Since the 1960s, newly established temples have not been required to register under the colonial-era Chinese Temples Ordinance, and the Committee at this point oversees only an estimated 24 of the Region's 600 temples. The Committee provides oversight of temple management and use of donations received by the temples.

Religious groups are able to apply for land at concessionary (less than market value) terms through sponsorship by the HAB, although they must still "compete" with any other parties interested in the same land for the grant from the Lands Department. Religious organizations can apply to develop religious facilities in accordance with local legislation or to use facilities at community halls or commercial buildings so long as such activities do not breach the land lease.

There were no religious tests for government service, and a wide range of faiths were represented in the Government, judiciary, and civil service. In addition, the Election Committee Ordinance stipulates that the six largest religious groups in Hong Kong hold 40 seats on the 800-member Election Committee, which is tasked with nominating and voting for the region's chief executive. The groups represented are the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, Hong Kong Christian Council, Hong Kong Taoist Association, the Confucian Academy, and the Hong Kong Buddhist Association. Leaders of their respective religious groups select the 40 representatives.

Religious groups are specifically exempted from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of nongovernmental organizations; therefore, registration with the Government remains voluntary. Since spiritual exercise groups are not classified as religious groups, these groups, including Falun Gong, are required to register under the Societies Ordinance. Members of Falun Gong are generally free to practice, organize, conduct nonviolent public demonstrations, and hold parades and distribute pamphlets. During the reporting period, Falun Gong maintained 12 regular information displays in high-traffic areas and regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, were registered and practiced freely.

A large variety of faith-based aid groups, including Protestant, Muslim, and Catholic groups, provide education, healthcare, and social welfare services. The

Government sometimes funds the operating costs of schools and hospitals built by religious groups. Schools run by religious institutions that receive public funding are governed by the 2004 Education (Amendment) Ordinance, which mandates that the schools establish an "incorporated management committee." Teacher and parent groups elect 40 percent of the members of the committee and the sponsoring body appoints 60 percent of the members.

Catholic and Protestant clergy give seminars and teach classes on the mainland at religious institutions and student exchanges were ongoing.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in the HKSAR. The Basic Law calls for ties between the region's religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect."

Falun Gong practitioners reported they were consistently declined access to public facilities they wished to rent for functions, usually because administrators reported the facilities to be previously booked.

There were reports in the media that that, on August 29, 2008, Daniel Ulrich, a Swiss citizen Falun Gong practitioner living in Taipei, was prevented from entering the territory. Ulrich told the media he had traveled as a professional photographer to pick up equipment for his company from a Hong Kong supplier. Although he presented evidence of his purchase to immigration officers, Ulrich was put back on a flight to Taipei. Ulrich told the media he discussed being a Falun Gong practitioner with immigration authorities who acknowledged that practicing Falun Gong in Hong Kong was legal.

Leeshai Lemish, a U.S. citizen and Falun Gong practitioner, told media he had been denied entry to Hong Kong on July 27, 2008. Lemish had reportedly traveled to the territory on multiple occasions. According to the *Taipei Times*, Lemish was coming from Taiwan as part of a research trip through Asia and had traveled to Hong Kong to apply for a visa to another country. After being held at the airport for three hours, Lemish said he was put on a plane back to Taiwan with no explanation other than that he did not meet "Hong Kong immigration requirements." The *Taipei Times* suggested that the fact that Lemish had been

traveling as a translator and assistant to author Ethan Gutmann, who is researching the persecution of Falun Gong, was a factor in the decision.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the region.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Falun Gong practitioners reported mistreatment by contract security guards employed by the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) when conducting protests outside CGLO offices in Western, including being sprayed with water on several occasions and other harassment. In August 2008, Falun Gong reported that security guards engaged in two physical attacks on practitioners attempting to take photographs either of water-spraying incidents or of the CGLO premises. While the *Epoch Times* ran articles critical of police handling of the cases, suggesting they were attempting to downplay the severity of the attacks, practitioners subsequently reported that police responded to their complaints. In one case, the suspect was released on bail; in the other, the guard was fined.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Senior government leaders often participate in large-scale events held by religious organizations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate general officers have made clear U.S. government interest in the full protection and maintenance of freedom of religion. Consulate general officers at all levels, including the consul general, met regularly with religious leaders and community representatives.

HUNGARY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were increased reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, suggesting an increase of anti-Semitic rhetoric in a climate of political friction and economic uncertainty. Extremist groups grew in size and number, frequently staging anti-Roma and anti-Semitic public events. At the same time, the far right-wing political party Jobbik grew in popularity, potentially bolstered by its close affiliation with the extremist group Magyar Garda (MG) and its openly anti-Semitic positions.

The U.S. Government continued to discuss religious freedom with the Government and with all elements of society, and it promoted religious and ethnic tolerance as part of its overall policy to protect human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 35,919 square miles and a population of 10.1 million. Data on religious affiliation is regarded as sensitive information and may not be officially recorded. However, the 2001 national census, the latest survey available, included an optional question on religious affiliation, to which 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the replies, the population is 55 percent Roman Catholic, 15 percent Hungarian Reformed, 3 percent Lutheran, and less than 1 percent Jewish. These four are the country's "historical" religious groups. In addition, 3 percent of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics, and 15 percent declared no religious affiliation. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include the Congregation of Faith, a broad range of other Christian groups, five Orthodox Christian religious groups, seven Buddhist groups, and three Islamic communities.

Data protection regulations impede the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, surveys suggest that citizens are less devout than the average central European. In a 2004 survey by the Economic

Research Institute of Hungary, 58 percent of respondents declared themselves to be "believers," and 55 percent responded that they believe in "God or the supernatural." Fifteen percent of believers declared that they attended religious services at least once a week, and 25 percent stated that they never did.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution provides for the free choice or acceptance of a religion or other conscientious convictions, the freedom for one to practice or abstain from practicing, and the right to exercise or teach one's religion and beliefs in public or in private, either individually or with others, through religious acts and ceremonies or in other ways.

The Constitution separates church and state. The state should remain neutral in matters concerning ideology; however, the state has a duty to ensure the possibility of freely forming personal convictions. Citizens also have the right to sue the Government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The Criminal Code has a provision on the "Violation of the Freedom of Conscience and Religion," which states that whoever restricts another person by violence or threats, or prevents another person from freely exercising his religion by violence or by threats, commits a crime, which is punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. If a person abuses someone because of his or her affiliation with a religious group, the crime is punishable by five years' imprisonment.

There is no state religion, and under the law every registered religious group is entitled to the same rights. The four "historical" religious groups (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Jewish) receive 93 percent of state financial support provided to religious groups. All registered religious groups also receive tax breaks.

Relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church are regulated by the 1990, 1994, and 1997 Vatican treaties. These agreements also serve as a framework for regulating state relations with other religious groups.

Citizens may donate 1 percent of their income tax to the religious group of their choice and receive a tax deduction. This applies to every legally registered religious group. In addition to taxpayer contributions, the Government allocates public funds to registered religious groups. Until 2008 the Government supplemented taxpayer contributions to registered groups with an additional 0.9 percent of the total income taxes collected. In 2009 the Government replaced the former system with a one-for-one matching program. Under this program, the government contributions consist of individual taxpayer contributions plus a government match. The new practice resulted in an overall decrease in state funding of churches from \$60 million (HUF 11.9 billion) in 2008 to \$50 million (HUF 9.8 billion) in 2009.

Additional government funding to religious organizations is provided for a range of activities, such as the maintenance of public art collections, reconstruction and renovation of religious institutions, support for religious instruction, compensation for nonrestituted religious property, and assistance to church personnel serving the smallest villages. In 2009 this financial assistance increased to \$82 million (HUF 16.1 billion) as compared to \$74 million (HUF 14.6 billion) in 2008.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

The state operates the army chaplain service for the four historical religious groups that have a significant number of members in the army. Free exercise of religion (not only in private but also in public) in the military is ensured for every denomination. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain service. The Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement regulates a similar system for the provision of religious services in prisons.

The 1990 Act on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities of, and the benefits enjoyed by, religious communities; it also establishes the criteria for legal designation. The county courts implement the registration of religious groups. To register, a group must be founded by 100 private individuals and must have a charter and elected organs of administration and representation. The court determines whether the new group complies with constitutional and legal requirements; if so, the court cannot reject the registration request. While any group is free to practice its faith, formal registration grants rights, imposes obligations on operating educational and social institutions, and provides access to

several forms of state funding. All registered groups have the same rights and obligations.

Five new religious groups were registered during the reporting period, including the Merlin-Circle Church, Community Mission, Life's Talking Charismatic Christian Church, Hungarian Branch of the Hungarian Reformed Christian Church in Croatia, and Marie's Temple Church. A total of 366 religious entities were registered by the end of the reporting period.

Registered religious groups have the right to provide religious education in public schools if requested by the students or parents. Religious instruction is not part of the curriculum in public schools, but the Government permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extracurricular religious education classes. Optional religious instruction is usually held after the normal school day and is taught in school facilities by representatives of various religious groups. While the Government makes provisions for minority religious groups to engage in religious education in public schools, the four "historical" groups provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. Nonpublic schools are not obliged to ensure religious education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Educational and social institutions, such as schools and elderly homes, maintained by registered religious groups are entitled under the law to receive the same public support as institutions maintained by the state or municipalities. However, state financial subsidies to various churches for educational and social services continued to be the most important source of contention in church-state relations. In 2007 the State Audit Office released an official report concluding that in 2005 and 2006 the Government underpaid subsidies to schools operated by religious organizations by \$14 million (HUF 2.7 billion). The Minister of Education and Culture stated that there was no exact method to calculate supplementary funding to church-run schools. Although this support increased in 2009 to an estimated \$337 million (HUF 66.2 billion) as compared to \$320 million (HUF 63.7 billion) in 2008, the "historical" religious groups expressed their desire to resolve this issue and set the correct method of calculating state funding by adopting a parliamentary law. The issue remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

Churches were generally critical of the Government's practice of distributing EU subsidies allocated for school reconstruction and infrastructure development. They claimed that the selection was discriminatory because a disproportionately low number of religious schools received funding as compared to state or locally operated schools.

Church leaders continued to object to delays and reductions in state financing for the maintenance of public art collections and other public services. Many church-run art collections were closed in the past few years due to the lack of state financial support.

On July 3, 2008, the Constitutional Court issued its ruling on a complaint filed by three politicians in 2006. The complaint alleged that the 2006 budget discriminated against church-run public services with respect to central budget financing and thus violated the 1997 Vatican treaty. The Court agreed with the plaintiffs and voided the respective section of the Education Act. In its ruling, the Court emphasized that state funding for religious institutions must not be less than the amount paid to state and locally operated schools and kindergartens.

The Government continued to facilitate the restitution of religious properties confiscated by the state during the Communist era and ensured equal opportunity for all religious organizations to regain control over their former property (see also Improvements and Positive Developments). In 2005 the Government adopted a resolution making it possible to fast-track property restitution negotiations and close outstanding claims in 2006 instead of by 2011 as the original law had established. Three religious groups (Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Budai Serb Orthodox) chose to use the new procedure; neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran churches opted for the procedure. By the end of the reporting period, 2,576 properties had been restituted and \$342 million (HUF 67.4 billion) paid as compensation. The Protestant and Lutheran churches had 101 outstanding cases at the end of the reporting period. Participants generally considered the procedure satisfactory. Members of the Jewish community viewed the restitution process as generally fair but wanted to see compensation paid for the estimated \$2.3 to \$18.6 billion (HUF 430 billion to 3.44 trillion) worth of heirless Jewish properties specifically excluded from the restitution process.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government and politicians from all parliamentary parties continued their efforts to combat anti-Semitism by speaking out against extremism and social intolerance.

On June 23, 2009, Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai paid a 2-day official visit to Israel. During his consultations with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Bajnai carefully distanced himself and his administration from the Jobbik party, whose politics he described as "unacceptable, extremist, aggressive, and antidemocratic." Bajnai also visited the Yad Vashem Museum to commemorate the country's Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

On April 19, 2009, more than 10,000 persons, including the Prime Minister and high-level politicians from every parliamentary party, participated in the March of the Living torchlight procession commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust. On April 16, 2009, the official Holocaust Remembrance Day in Hungary, government officials paid tribute to the country's victims of the Holocaust at commemorations held at various venues around Budapest.

On April 7, 2009, Parliament Speaker Katalin Szili and then-Minister of Local Governments Istvan Gyenesei attended the "Righteous Among the Nations" award ceremony organized by the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Institute.

On January 26, 2009, various public figures attended the commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp at the Holocaust Documentation Center.

On September 29, 2008, former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany published a public letter marking the Jewish New Year Rosh Hashanah in which he underlined the importance of peace and reconciliation.

The Prime Minister, senior government officials, and representatives of other parties routinely countered various far-right demonstrations by initiating and

participating in several demonstrations supporting tolerance and religious freedom during the reporting period.

The Government continued to restore the religious properties confiscated during the Communist era to the religious groups that owned them. According to a 1991 law, in the case of a reciprocal agreement, the monetary claim relating to the religious property may be transformed into a source of annuity, which can be used for financing the religious and public purpose activity of the church. Through the end of the reporting period, the Government had restituted 2,576 religious properties (worth up to \$528 million or HUF 104 billion) and paid as compensation \$342 million (HUF 67.4 billion); 101 such properties remained unresolved.

The Government continued to process petitions under Act XLVII, which allowed compensation claims from individuals whose immediate relatives were killed in the Holocaust or in Soviet forced labor camps, or lost their lives between 1939 and 1989 due to politically motivated despotic action of government authorities, as well as from those who performed forced labor due to racial, religious, or political reasons during World War II. The deadline for submitting claims expired in December 2006. Eligible individuals could apply for a lump sum worth up to \$2,000 (HUF 400,000) for each spouse, parent, or child; a lump sum worth \$1,000 (HUF 200,000) for each sibling who was killed; and compensation notes or a monthly life annuity for forced labor. More than 97,600 claims from 60 countries were submitted to the Separate Compensation and Documentary Department of the Central Office of Justice. By the end of 2008, 49,481 decisions had been issued and \$7.6 million (HUF 1.6 billion) transferred to eligible applicants.

During the reporting period, cooperation between authorities and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) to provide access to the Holocaust-era archives continued. In October 2008 the Ministry of Finance transferred a previously closed collection of compensation and restitution records relating to the Holocaust era to the country's National Archives, where the records became available to researchers. The archives also became part of the USHMM microfilming project.

On December 16, 2008, the Budapest Municipal Court issued a ruling that disbanded the Magyar Garda Association (MGA) for failing to meet legal requirements to form an association and for conducting operations that infringe on the freedom and rights of the Romani people. The MGA, which was formed in 2007 by the Jobbik party to "preserve the country's traditions and culture," caused anxiety within the Jewish communities, as MGA members dressed in uniforms and

carried flags associated with a World War II fascist organization, the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party. Although the MGA is primarily focused on calling the public's attention to so-called gypsy crime, members of the paramilitary group frequently chanted anti-Semitic slogans during their regular demonstrations. The MGA appealed the ruling, and the case was pending at end of the reporting period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were several reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period.

On June 15, 2009, unidentified perpetrators placed pig's feet amid the bronze sculptures of shoes on the embankment of the Danube commemorating the thousands of mostly Jews who fell into the river after being shot by members of the Arrow Cross party in 1944-45. In response to the defamation of the Holocaust memorial monument, over the following days, several thousand persons demonstrated against racism, including the Prime Minister and various other politicians.

On April 18, 2009, a day ahead of the March of the Living procession organized by the Jewish communities, far-right demonstrators marched to the German Embassy in Budapest to deny the Holocaust and protest against the "Zionist world rule." An estimated 250 persons, including 60 wearing MG uniforms, carried posters and wore shirts with anti-Semitic messages. Renegade MGA captain Istvan Dosa said in his speech that "nothing from the Holocaust is true," and a petition directed to the German Embassy was read. Although Holocaust denial is not illegal, police initiated procedures against Dosa and another speaker for "incitement against a community." Their case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

On April 4, 2009, Jobbik, the MG, and the Hungarian National Front coorganized an event commemorating the 1882 "blood libel" trial in which residents of Tiszaeszlár accused the local Jewish community of killing a 14-year-old Christian peasant girl to use her blood at their religious ceremony. Police ordered an investigation into the event after the media reported that the approximately 80 participants made anti-Semitic comments. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

On February 24, 2009, the World Jewish Congress joined the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ) in denouncing the anti-Semitic comments made by a local government official from the town of Rajka. The official, Attila

Kiss, called on other officials to take up "sickles and swords" and exorcise the synagogue on Kossuth Street. MAZSIHISZ lodged an official complaint against Kiss, but the Prosecutor's Office closed down the investigation, noting the lack of "clear and present danger" for any physical abuse, a precondition set by laws protecting freedom of speech.

On December 23, 2008, neo-Nazi protesters disrupted a Hanukkah celebration in Budapest by shouting anti-Semitic epithets not far from an outdoor ceremony.

On September 28, 2008, seven masked, far-right extremists threw acid and animal feces at patrons at the Budapest Jewish Theater. A neo-Nazi blogger claimed responsibility for the attack but said the intended target was the show's Jewish playwright, Zoltan Toepler. The theater had reportedly requested police security for the performance after several persons associated with the production received threatening messages. Police were scheduled to provide security but reportedly received information that the event had been cancelled. They arrived later, but not in time to apprehend the attackers.

On July 17, 2008, members of a Budapest district council informed police of the reported screening of the 1941 Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitic film *Jud Suss*. Police investigated two brothers who were suspected of showing the film without the required permission from the German Foundation. The brothers also allegedly sold Nazi and neo-Nazi objects as part of a business venture. The brothers responded by filing a complaint with the Budapest Chief Prosecutor's Office, claiming that the investigation lacked legal merit. Referring to freedom of speech regulations, the Prosecutor's Office agreed with the brothers, stating that their acts did not constitute "hate mongering." Police continued the investigation despite the Prosecutor Office's decision. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

The weekly newspaper *Magyar Demokrata* continued to publish anti-Semitic articles, as did the more radical weekly *Magyar Forum*. Using coded language, the national daily *Magyar Hirlap* also published several anti-Semitic opinion pieces. There were numerous far-right websites in the country, many of which were openly anti-Semitic. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that the Government monitored the websites for content, because by law public display of symbols such as the swastika, hammer and sickle, and red star is prohibited.

During 2008 there were 365 reports of vandalism or destruction of Jewish and Christian properties (31 in houses of worship and 334 in cemeteries), as compared

to 287 reported cases in 2007. Police and religious authorities claimed that many of the incidents were acts of youthful vandalism and not necessarily manifestations of religious intolerance.

On December 26, 2008, 20 graves were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in Veszprem.

On November 9, 2008, unknown perpetrators broke the window of the Jewish religious community headquarters adjacent to the synagogue in Debrecen. The Jewish community suspected the attack was motivated by anti-Semitism, noting that it occurred on the day of the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht, when Nazi storm troopers set synagogues and Jewish stores on fire in Germany and Austria.

On October 30, 2008, three teenage boys admitted to vandalizing 13 headstones in a Catholic cemetery as well as a Calvinist cemetery in Nagyigmand.

On September 25, 2008, vandals destroyed two religious statues in the garden of the Catholic parsonage in Kiskunhalas.

In 2009 the Jerusalem-based Simon Wiesenthal Center downgraded the country for lagging behind in its efforts to prosecute alleged Nazi war criminal Sandor Kepiro. Kepiro was convicted in 1944 and 1946 by Hungarian courts for his role in the January 1942 Novi Sad massacre in Serbia in which more than 1,000 persons were killed, most of whom were Jews; however, his punishment was never carried out. In 2006 Kepiro was discovered living in Budapest by the U.S.-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, and in 2007 the Prosecutor's Office opened a new case against Kepiro after the court ruled that the old records attesting that the verdict had been lost and thus the sentence could not be carried out. Government authorities requested legal assistance from the Republic of Serbia to collect relevant records and evidence kept in Serbian archives. Investigation of war crimes charges against Kepiro continued throughout the reporting period.

Christian churches and the Jewish community continued to organize regular events under the auspices of the Christian-Jewish Society, which brings together religious academicians for discussions. Religious groups also demonstrated strong willingness to work together across a wide range of other areas to achieve common social and political goals. On November 13, 2008, the Budapest conference of the Catholic-Jewish Relations International Committee issued a statement declaring that the Catholic and Jewish dialogue that results in growing friendship and understanding is a "sign of hope and inspiration for our troubled world."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government regularly discussed with the Government the issue of anti-Semitic public incidents organized by extremist groups as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with Members of Parliament, political party leaders, and representatives of local and international NGOs that address matters of religious freedom. U.S. embassy officers closely tracked anti-Semitic incidents and regularly consulted with leaders of religious groups to assess the threat.

The Embassy continued to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech and urged all parties to do the same. The U.S. Ambassador and Chargé d'Affaires frequently attended events organized by religious communities. On April 19, 2009, the Chargé joined more than 10,000 others at the March of the Living torchlight procession organized by the Jewish community. On April 16, 2009, the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Day, the Chargé participated in an awards ceremony for the "Faces of the Victims" photograph competition organized by the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest.

On March 19, 2009, the Embassy sponsored an international anti-Semitism conference at the Central European University in Budapest. Conference speakers assessed topics such as the state of anti-Semitism in contemporary Europe, legal responses to hate speech, and anti-Semitism in the media and on the Internet. Participants also shared examples of combating anti-Semitism in education, society, and the political arena.

In March 2009 the Embassy concluded its video competition to promote tolerance among young persons. The competition invited high school students to submit a short video on YouTube that conveyed the message of tolerance. The 75-plus video submissions were viewed on YouTube more than 20,000 times by the end of the reporting period.

In January 2009 embassy officers canvassed the country and met with more than 1,200 high school students to promote tolerance. During the visits, officers gave the students embassy-produced yellow wristbands embossed with the word "tolerance."

On December 9, 2008, the Embassy hosted a seminar on teaching the Holocaust in the classroom. Conducted by USHMM expert Stephen Feinberg, the seminar gave teachers unique approaches to teaching the Holocaust to their students.

On November 20, 2008, the Ambassador participated in the commemoration of the Jewish victims of the 1956 revolution. On November 13, 2008, the Ambassador met with Jewish leaders in Debrecen and publicly denounced violence and intolerance in the wake of the attack on the Jewish community headquarters there four days earlier. On September 15, 2008, the Ambassador delivered opening remarks prior to the lecture of visiting American Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis.

The Embassy held successful consultations with the Ministry of Finance on transferring the Holocaust-related records from the Ministry to the country's National Archives, which would grant the USHMM improved archival access. The Embassy also remained active on issues of compensation and property restitution for Holocaust victims. Embassy officers worked with MAZSIHISZ, other local and international Jewish organizations, Members of Parliament, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Office on restitution issues to promote fair compensation.

The Embassy maintained an active agenda of events with the Romani community as well, underscoring the importance of tolerance for all minorities.

ICELAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, the state financially supports and promotes Lutheranism as the country's official religion. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is the state church, enjoys some advantages not available to other religious groups. The church provides social services regardless of creed.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 39,600 square miles and a population of 320,000. Reykjavik and its environs are home to approximately 60 percent of the population.

According to the National Statistical Bureau, 252,948 persons (79 percent of the population) are members of the state Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). In 2008, 1,453 individuals resigned from the Church, while the Church baptized 223 new registrants other than infants. Many of those who resigned joined one of the organizationally and financially independent Lutheran Free Churches, which have a total membership of 15,999 (5 percent of the population). A total of 18,818 persons (5.9 percent) are members of 27 other small recognized and registered religious organizations ranging from the Roman Catholic Church (9,351 members) to Homechurch (11 members). There are 22,726 individuals (7.1 percent) who belong to other or unspecified religious organizations and 9,265 (2.9 percent) who are not members of any religious organization. There are also religions, such as Judaism, that have been practiced in the country for years but whose followers have never requested official recognition. The National Statistical Bureau does not keep track of Jewish community numbers, and there is no synagogue or Jewish

cultural center; however, up to 60 persons attend occasional Jewish events and activities organized by a few Jewish immigrants.

Although the majority of citizens use traditional Lutheran rituals to mark events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, most Lutherans do not regularly attend Sunday services.

The number of foreigners receiving residence permits increased significantly between 2004 and 2008. In direct relation to the increase in foreigners (itinerant workers, immigrants, and refugees), the number of religious organizations significantly increased.

Foreigners constitute an estimated 80 percent of the Roman Catholic population. The Roman Catholic Church in Iceland estimated that the total of registered members may only capture one-half of the actual number of Catholics in the country. The Reykjavik Catholic Church holds one weekly English-language service, and a number of Poles, Filipinos, and Lithuanians attend. Services are also conducted in other languages in other areas nationwide. The Catholic congregation includes a large number of Poles, served by four Polish priests. In addition to Icelandic priests, the Catholic Church employs priests from Argentina, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom. Since there are few Catholic churches outside of Reykjavik, Lutheran ministers regularly lend their churches to Catholic priests so that they can conduct Masses for members in rural areas.

There are two registered religious organizations representing Islam and approximately 800 to 1,200 Muslims living in the country, according to those groups. The Association of Muslims in Iceland (Felag muslima a Islandi), founded in 1997, has 402 members, and the Islamic Cultural Center of Iceland (Menningarsetur muslima a Islandi), registered in 2009, has an estimated 200 members. Muslims are concentrated in the capital area (although there are a number of Kosovar Muslim refugees in the small northern town of Dalvik). The two organizations have their own houses of worship, with daily prayer nights and weekly Friday prayers that attract a core group of approximately 30-50 and 60-70 individuals, respectively.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The official state religion is Lutheranism.

The Constitution provides all persons the right to form religious associations and to practice religion in accordance with their personal beliefs. However, it also bans teaching or practices harmful to good morals or public order.

Article 62 of the Constitution establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the state church and pledges the state's support and protection. Parliament has the power to pass a law to change this article. Although polls show that the majority of citizens favor the concept of separation of church and state, most probably would not support the change if it meant closing Lutheran churches because of lack of funding. According to statistics from the State Church Bishop's Office on services in which state church ministers or facilities play a role, which frequently include services for non-ELC members, nine of ten children are baptized in their first year, more than 90 percent of adolescents are confirmed, 75 percent of the total population is married in the church, and 99 percent are buried with church ceremonies. Although few citizens regularly attend services, they see the Lutheran religion as part of their culture and view the closing of a church as losing a part of their heritage. Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, which has approximately 300 members, strongly supports legislation to separate church and state.

The state directly pays the salaries of the 139 ministers in the state church, and these ministers are considered public servants under the Ministry of Judicial and Ecclesiastical Affairs. These ministers counsel persons of all faiths and offer ecumenical services for marriages and funerals. The Lutheran Bishop of Iceland appoints state church ministers. The state operates a network of Lutheran parish churches throughout the country, and land use plans for new housing include parish churches as necessary. State radio broadcasts worship services every Sunday morning and daily devotions morning and night, contributing to state Lutheran domination of religion-oriented broadcasting.

The General Penal Code protects religious practice by establishing fines and imprisonment for up to three months for those who publicly deride or belittle the religious doctrines or worship of a lawful religious association active in the country.

The Government observes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve (afternoon only), Christmas Day, and Boxing Day as national holidays.

A 1999 law sets specific conditions and procedures that religious organizations must follow to gain state subsidies. All taxpayers 16 years of age and older must pay a church tax of approximately \$82 (ISK 10,260) in 2009--lowered from ISK 10,344 in 2008. Individuals may direct their church tax payments to any of the religious groups the state has officially registered and recognized. For persons who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered, the tax payment goes to the University of Iceland, a secular institution. Atheists have objected to having their taxes go to the university, asserting that this is inconsistent with the constitutional right of freedom of association.

During the reporting period, the Government gave the state church approximately \$41.6 million (ISK 5.2 billion). Of that amount, the church tax funded \$16.2 million (ISK 2.02 billion), the cemetery tax \$7.5 million (ISK 939 million), and general revenues \$17.9 million (ISK 2.24 billion). The state church operates all cemeteries, and the money from the cemetery tax must be used solely for this purpose. All recognized religious groups have equal access to the country's cemeteries. The church tax also provided \$2 million (ISK 255 million) to the other recognized religious groups and \$1.7 million (ISK 210 million) to the University of Iceland.

In July 2008 the European Court of Human Rights agreed to take up a suit brought by the Icelandic Pagan Association (Asatruarfelagid) over its claimed right to receive funding proportional to its membership from monies currently made available only to the state church. In 2006 the Association sued the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Ministry of Finance for access to such funding. These funds supplement the income that the national church receives from church taxes, which the plaintiff asserted favors state Lutheranism in violation of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Association lost at the District (2006) and Supreme Court (2007) levels and appealed to the European Court of Human Rights. The case had not been heard by the end of the reporting period.

The Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs handles applications for recognition and registration of religious organizations. The law provides for a three-member panel consisting of a theologian, a lawyer, and a social scientist to

review the application. To register, a religious organization must "practice a creed or religion that can be linked to the religions of humankind that have historical or cultural roots...be well established...be active and stable...have a core group of members who regularly practice the religion in compliance with its teachings and should pay church taxes...." All registered religious organizations are required to submit an annual report to the Ministry describing the organization's operations over the past year. The law also specifies that the leader of a religious organization must be at least 25 years old and pay taxes in the country. No restrictions or requirements are placed on unregistered religious organizations, which have the same rights as other groups in society. During the reporting period, one group, the Islamic Cultural Center of Iceland (Menningarsetur muslima a Islandi), applied to register as a religious organization. Authorities approved the application in March 2009. A 2008 registration application by the New Avalon Center remained under review at the end of the reporting period.

The law confirms that parents control the religious affiliation of their children until the children reach the age of 16. Changes require the consent of both parents if they both have custody; if only one parent has custody, then the consent of the other parent is not required. However, the Children's Act requires that parents consult their children about any changes in the children's affiliation after the age of 12, and such changes require the requesting children's signatures. In the absence of specific instructions to the contrary from both parents (or from the mother only if the father is not claiming paternal rights or is unknown), children at birth are registered as having the same religious affiliation as their mothers.

Virtually all schools are public schools. School grades 1-10 (ages 6-15) are required by law to include instruction in theology. The law also mandates that general teaching practices be shaped by "the Christian heritage of Icelandic culture, equality, responsibility, concern, tolerance, and respect for human value."

The precise content of this instruction can vary, and some observers have claimed that religious indoctrination can take place, as the curriculum is not rigid and teachers often are given wide latitude in the classroom. Lessons on non-Christian religions are part of the curriculum, but teachers focus mostly on Christianity. The compulsory curriculum for Christianity, ethics, and theology, does, however, suggest a multicultural approach to religious education and an emphasis on teaching a variety of beliefs. In secondary schools, theology continued to be taught under the rubric of "community studies" along with sociology, philosophy, and history.

In fall 2007 the town of Gardabaer's compulsory levels (grades 1-10) discontinued a year-old state church-run pastoral care program for students. The towns of Alftanes and Mosfellsbaer continued to use the program, which was introduced in those towns in 2006 and 1999, respectively. School authorities and the municipality where a school is located, without any involvement by the Ministry of Education, decide if they want to offer the program. The Ethical Humanist Association Sidmennt and representatives from nonstate religious organizations continued their public criticism of the program's use in public schools, claiming that the pastoral care program contained aspects of religious indoctrination. Those who supported the program stated that it was merely a means for students to talk about their feelings with a minister or a deacon and noted that participation in the program was not mandatory. A minority of students took advantage of the service.

Students may be exempted from Christianity classes. The law provides the Minister of Education with the authority to exempt pupils from instruction in compulsory subjects such as Christianity. In practice individual school authorities issue exemptions informally. There is no obligation for school authorities to offer other religious or secular instruction in place of Christianity classes. Some observers have noted that this discourages students or their parents from requesting such exemptions and may isolate students who seek exemptions or put them at risk of bullying in schools.

The Government does not actively promote interfaith understanding and does not sponsor programs or an official church-government council to coordinate interfaith dialogue; however, many church groups sponsor meetings between the leaders of various religious organizations. A Japanese-born minister of the state church has been designated to serve immigrant communities and help recent arrivals of all religious groups integrate into society.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In January 2008 the City of Reykjavik awarded a plot of land to the Icelandic Pagan Association to build a place of worship. This followed the signature of a declaration of intent in 2006. Architectural delays and funding constraints during the year postponed the start of construction of the Association's place of worship.

In September 2008 the City of Reykjavik awarded the Icelandic Buddhist Movement a plot of land to build a temple.

In November 2007 the city approved a detailed land use plan that included a plot of land available for the construction of a Russian Orthodox church. Leasing and architectural design discussions were underway at the end of the reporting period.

The long-pending application to the Reykjavik City Planning Commission for land to build a mosque, originally filed with the city in 2000, encountered further delay during the reporting period, in part because of what the commission described as uncertainty over which of two groups was the appropriate representative of the Muslim community. However, in previous years the city cited other reasons for the delay in processing the application. Some observers thought that prejudice was behind the delay in approval, since other groups' applications for similar plots made swifter progress during that time.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. If members of religious minorities face discrimination, it is indirect in nature, taking the form of prejudice and lack of interfaith or intercultural understanding. The country has a small, close-knit, homogenous society that closely guards its culture and is not accustomed to accommodating outsiders. Although most citizens are not active members of the state church, Lutheranism remains an important part of the country's cultural identity.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of isolated incidents where individuals harassed Muslim women by removing their headscarves on the streets of Reykjavik.

Muslims in the country, seconded by independent observers, expressed concern that Omega, a Christian television station, broadcast distorted, negative coverage of Muslims and Islam. The station's broadcast area included approximately 75 percent of the country's population.

The Forum for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation, representing major registered religious groups, continued to meet during the reporting period. The forum was established after a meeting in 2005 sponsored by the national church and has the goal of fostering dialogue and strengthening links between religious groups and life-stance organizations. The forum states that it is open to all registered religious organizations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintains a regular dialogue on religious freedom issues with the leaders of various religious groups and nongovernmental organizations.

INDIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, some state level laws and policies restricted this freedom.

The National Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, some state and local governments imposed limits on this freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the National Government during the reporting period; however, problems remained in some areas. Some state governments enacted and amended "anticonversion" laws, and police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly to counter communal attacks effectively, including attacks against religious minorities.

India is the birthplace of several religions--Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism--and the home for more than a thousand years of Jewish, Zoroastrian, Muslim, and Christian communities. The vast majority of Indians of all religious groups lived in peaceful coexistence; however, there were some organized communal attacks against minority religious groups. The country's democratic system, open society, independent legal institutions, vibrant civil society, and freewheeling press all provide mechanisms to address violations of religious freedom when they occur.

Violence erupted in August 2008 in Orissa after individuals affiliated with left-wing Maoist extremists killed a Hindu religious leader in Kandhamal, the country's poorest district. According to government statistics, 40 persons died and 134 were injured. Although most victims were Christians, the underlying causes that led to the violence have complex ethnic, economic, religious, and political roots related to land ownership and government-reserved employment and educational benefits.

Religious extremists committed numerous terrorist attacks throughout the country during the reporting period. Terrorists attacked Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and Delhi. On September 28, 2008, there was a bomb blast in Malegaon, Maharashtra, outside a building where the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) previously had an office. The blast killed 7 persons and injured more than 90. Several figures, including a sadhvi (Hindu holy woman), associated with Hindu nationalist groups were arrested in the blast investigation. On November 26, 2008, 10 terrorists carried out coordinated attacks across Mumbai over the course of three days and killed 173 persons, including several foreigners. The terrorists attacked luxury hotels, a crowded railway station, a Jewish center, a hospital, and

INDIA

restaurants. Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab, the only terrorist captured alive, disclosed that the attackers belonged to the terrorist organization Lashkar e-Tayyiba (LeT).

On May 1, 2009, the Supreme Court ordered speedy trials of cases relating to eight major incidents from the 2002 Gujarat violence; however, hundreds of other court cases stemming from this violence remained unsettled.

The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials, and supported initiatives to encourage religious and communal harmony. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, senior U.S. officials discussed reports of harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries, as well as state-level legislation restricting conversion, the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, and the plight of displaced Kashmiri Pandits. Senior U.S. officials also raised U.S. concerns with senior Government officials about the violence against Christians in Orissa and Karnataka.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1.3 million square miles and a population of 1.1 billion. According to the 2001 government census, Hindus constitute 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Slightly more than 85 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Tribal groups (indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which are generally included among Hindus in government statistics, often practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs (animism).

There are large Muslim populations in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala; Muslims are the majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Although Muslims are a minority, India is the world's third largest Muslim country in terms of population. Christians are concentrated in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) have large Christian majorities. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

Approximately 200 million persons, or 17 percent of the population, belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST, formerly called "untouchables")

INDIA

and also known as "Dalits"). Some converted from Hinduism to other religious groups, ostensibly to escape widespread discrimination.

Under the National Commission for Minorities Act of 1992, five religious communities--Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, and Buddhists--are considered minority communities.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some state and local governments limited this freedom by enacting or amending "anticonversion" legislation and by not efficiently or effectively prosecuting those who attacked religious minorities.

Despite the National Government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses the inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, "Hindutva" continued to influence the policies of some state and local governments and actions at the state and local levels. The National Government, led by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), continued to implement an inclusive and secular platform that included respect for the right to religious freedom.

Where "anticonversion" laws are not in place, local authorities on occasion relied upon certain sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to arrest persons engaged in religious activities. For example, IPC Section 153A prohibits "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony." IPC Section 295A prohibits "deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs."

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose or change their religion as well as to practice the religion of their choice. The country has historically been fertile ground for all religious traditions to flourish. Many NGOs argued that state-level "anticonversion" laws are unconstitutional and may reinforce the dominance of the Hindu majority. Although these laws do not explicitly ban conversions, the NGOs argue that in practice "anticonversion" laws, by design and implementation,

INDIA

infringe upon an individual's right to convert, favor Hinduism over minority religions, and represent a significant challenge to secularism.

While the law generally provides remedy for violations of religious freedom, it was not enforced rigorously or effectively in many cases pertaining to religiously oriented violence. Legal protections exist to cover discrimination or persecution by private actors. The country's political system is federal and accords state governments exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which limits the National Government's capacity to deal directly with state-level abuses, including abuses of religious freedom. The national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the state government's permission. However, the National Government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to do so.

Despite government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period.

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has at times been aligned with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, held power in six states: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, and Karnataka. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) alleged that during the reporting period, the BJP stoked communally sensitive matters as state elections grew near. During the country's five-phase national elections, the largest electoral exercise in human history, there were no reports of religious violence. On March 6, 2009, a video of a BJP candidate, Varun Gandhi, surfaced that allegedly showed him making inflammatory statements against Indian Muslims while campaigning in Uttar Pradesh. The independent Election Commission directed the Chief Electoral Officer in the state to file a case against Gandhi. The UP state government charged him under the National Security Act. On March 29, 2009, Gandhi surrendered to the police but received parole on April 16, 2009, and was allowed to contest the elections. On May 16, 2009, the Supreme Court ordered charges against Gandhi under the National Security Act withdrawn due to lack of evidence.

INDIA

In her speech to the first session of the 15th Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) after the national elections, President Pratibha Patil stated her government "will continue to accord the highest priority to the welfare of minorities" and consolidate actions underway to ensure "an equitable share for the minorities in government resources, jobs, and plans."

The Ministry for Minority Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) are governmental bodies created to investigate allegations of discrimination and make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or national government authorities. Although NHRC recommendations do not have the force of law, central and local authorities generally follow them. The NCM and NHRC intervened in several instances of communal tension; the enactment of anticonversion legislation in several states; and incidents of harassment and violence against minorities. Such intervention included high-profile cases, such as the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat and the attacks against the Christian community in Orissa. The National Government earmarked \$350 million (approximately Rs. 17 billion) for 2009-10, an increase of 74 percent from the prior year, for the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

In 2008 the NCM published its study on the status of Dalits in Muslim and Christian communities. The NCM argued that Dalit converts continued to face discrimination, even by their new coreligionists, and that religious affiliation made no difference in the socioeconomic status of Dalits. The Commission recommended that reservations, a form of affirmative action, be extended to Muslim and Christian Dalits.

In 2004 Parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions and in 2006 it empowered the Commission to resolve disputes and investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

Federal and state laws that regulate religion include the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, several state-level "anticonversion" laws, the Andhra Pradesh antipropagation law, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, the Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

INDIA

The FCRA regulates foreign contributions to NGOs, including faith-based NGOs. Some organizations complained that the FCRA prevented them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities.

There are active "anticonversion" laws in five of the 28 states: Gujarat, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh; however, there were no reports of convictions under these laws during the reporting period. Arunachal Pradesh has an inactive "anticonversion" law awaiting regulations needed for enforcement.

Christian groups in Karnataka alleged that the state government planned to introduce an anticonversion law; however, state government officials insisted no such law was being contemplated.

In April 2008 Gujarat State implemented its "Freedom of Religion Law," which proscribes religious conversions by means of allurement, force, or fraud. There were no reports of arrests or convictions under the law during the reporting period. According to the All India Christian Council (AICC), the Gujarat government investigated only three conversions during the last five years, and there were no reports of arrests or convictions under the law during the reporting period. The Gujarat United Christian Forum for Human Rights filed a legal action in the Gujarat High Court in February 2009 contesting the requirement that prospective converts obtain permission from the state government prior to a conversion ceremony. By the end of the reporting period, no court date had been set.

In March 2008 the BJP-ruled government of Rajasthan passed an "anticonversion" law that would restrict and regulate religious proselytism, but the Governor refused to sign it into law. In December 2008 the Congress Party won state assembly elections and made no attempts to gain passage of the law.

The State Assembly passed the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act in 2006, and the Governor signed it into law in 2007. The law states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law stipulates punishment of up to two years' imprisonment and/or a fine of \$625 (Rs. 25,000). If SC/ST members or minors are involved, penalties are five years' imprisonment and/or a \$1,250 (Rs. 50,000) fine. Any member of a religious group wishing to change his or her religious beliefs is required to give 30 days' prior notification to district authorities or otherwise face punishment of one month's

INDIA

imprisonment and/or a \$25 (Rs. 1,000) fine. Returning to one's previous religious group is not considered a violation of this law. According to NGO sources, in 2008 60 families were reconverted to Hinduism in the state and no complaint was filed under the Act.

Under provisions in the states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh (MP), it is prohibited "to convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." In 2007 the governors of both states rejected a proposed amendment requiring that a government official be notified before a conversion ceremony could take place. According to the Christian Legal Association, a number of Christian pastors and workers were charged under sections 3 and 4 of the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 1969, but no convictions have taken place. On June 29, 2009, the National Government refused to approve amendments to MP's Freedom of Religion Act that would make it mandatory for any person wanting to convert to another religion to inform the district magistrate in advance.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law defines force as "a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication," fraud as "misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance," and inducement as "the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise." Penalties for breaking the law include imprisonment, a fine, or both. Penalties are harsher if the offense involves minors, women, or an SC/ST member. The law also requires that district magistrates maintain a list of religious organizations and individuals propagating religious beliefs, that individuals intending to convert provide a declaration before a magistrate, that clergy declare the intent to officiate in a conversion ceremony, and that police officers determine if there are objections to a given conversion. There were no reports of district magistrates denying permission for religious conversions or of convictions under the act during the period covered by this report.

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967 empowers the Government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA.

INDIA

There were no requirements for religious groups to be licensed; however, the Government prohibits foreign missionaries of any religious group from entering the country without prior clearance and usually expels those who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long-established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but the Government has not admitted new resident foreign missionaries since the mid-1960s. There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, the Foreigners Act prohibits speaking publicly against the religious beliefs of others. The act prohibits visitors on tourist visas from preaching without prior permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In 2007 Andhra Pradesh enacted the "Propagation of other religions in the places of worship or prayer (Prohibition) Law." Thus far, the state has identified only Hindu religious sites for this protection. Punishment for violations of the act can include imprisonment up to three years and fines up to \$125 (Rs. 5,312). To date, there have been no prosecutions under the act. A fact-finding team from the NCM found that the prohibition is not in line with the Constitution's protections of freedom of religion, adding that the IPC has provisions sufficient to deal with offenses committed in places of worship.

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, UP, and West Bengal have laws regulating the construction of public religious buildings and the use of public places for religious purposes.

In 2006 the Kerala High Court determined that Allah is synonymous with God and ruled that taking an official oath in the name of Allah is constitutionally valid.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 lists offenses, including those pertaining to religious duties and practices, against disadvantaged persons and provides for steep penalties for offenders.

Article 17 of the Constitution outlawed untouchability; however, members of lower castes remained in a disadvantageous position. The Government continued to implement a quota system that reserved government jobs and places in higher education institutions for SC/ST members belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist religious groups, but not for Christians or Muslims.

Christian groups filed a court case demanding that SC converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to "reservations" (quotas) as other SC and argued that Christian SC suffer from the same caste-based socioeconomic and political stigmas

INDIA

and discrimination. Opponents argued that there is no caste system in Christianity and, therefore, no need to extend reservations to SC Christians. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which had not ruled by the end of the reporting period. Reservations existed in Andhra Pradesh for Muslims. Reservations also existed for certain Muslim other backward class (OBC) communities in Maharashtra. In 2007 the Mishra Commission recommended that 15 percent of government jobs in services and places in educational institutions be reserved for minorities. The Commission also recommended including Muslim and Christian Dalits on the SC/ST list. The Supreme Court was reviewing this matter at the end of the reporting period.

Under Article 25 of the Constitution, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism are considered sects of Hinduism; however, these groups view themselves as unique and sought to introduce their own separate personal laws. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to legally recognize their uniqueness and preclude ambiguity. The 1992 NCM Act identified Buddhism as a separate religion. The Supreme Court rejected the inclusion of Jainism under the Act, stating that the practice of adding new religious groups as minorities should be discouraged. According to press reports, state governments have power to grant minority status to religious groups designated as minorities under the 1992 Act, but not all states have officially done so. In June 2008 the Delhi Government decided to accord minority status to the Jain community. Jains have also been accorded this status in the states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and UP. The states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka recognize Sikhs as minorities.

There are different personal status laws for the various religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. The Government grants a significant amount of autonomy to personal status law boards in crafting these laws. There is Hindu law, Christian law, Parsi law, and Islamic law--all legally recognized and judicially enforceable. None is exempt from national and state-level legislative powers and social reform obligations as laid down in the Constitution.

The Divorce Act of 2001 limits inheritance, alimony payments, and property ownership of persons from interfaith marriages and prohibits their use of churches to celebrate marriage ceremonies in which one party is a non-Christian. Clergy who contravene its provisions could face up to 10 years' imprisonment. The act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

INDIA

In November 2007, under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2006, the Government provided clearance for members of all religious groups to legally adopt children.

The Government permits private religious schools but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. The Government may prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public funding. Others may use their own criteria, including religious affiliation.

Many Hindu sects have established schools, although they do not receive aid from the state.

There are approximately 30,000 madrassahs (Islamic schools) providing full- or part-time education in India. Most did not accept government aid, alleging that it would subject them to stringent security clearance requirements. Educational institutions given "minority status" by the Government are not eligible for government aid. The 2006 Report on the Social and Economic Status of Muslims in India (the Sachar Report) noted that Muslim communities are disproportionately underserved regarding access to schools, credit, and housing.

The major holy days of the predominant religious groups are considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian); the two Eids (Islamic); Lord Buddha's Birthday (Buddhist); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh); Dussehra, Diwali, and Holi (Hindu); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government renewed the ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in February 2008 for two more years, due to the organization's alleged connections to terrorism. SIMI challenged the ban, but the Supreme Court upheld it. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal in February 2008 extended the August 2007 ban on an Islamic sect, Deenadar Anjuman, for two more years.

The Government maintained a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country because they contain material that government censors deem inflammatory and apt to provoke communal or religious tensions. The Rajasthan government continued to ban the books *Haqeeqat (The Truth)* and *Ve Sharm Se Hindu Kahate Hain Kyon? (Why Do They Say With Shame They Are Hindus?)* for alleged blasphemy against Hindu gods. In December 2008 police officers in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, arrested Lenin Kumar, editor of *Nisan*, for criticizing

INDIA

Hindu fundamentalist organizations in a booklet on the anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal; he was later released on bail.

The opposition party BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups. However, the RSS opposed conversions from Hinduism and expressed the view that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values. During the reporting period, the BJP continued to advocate contentious measures, such as the passage of "anticonversion" legislation in all states, the construction of a Hindu temple on the Ayodhya site, a religious site disputed by Hindus and Muslims, and the enactment of a uniform civil code.

The country conducted parliamentary elections in April-May 2009 in which 714 million citizens were eligible to vote. Aside from an inflammatory speech by a BJP candidate campaigning in northern UP, the elections were largely devoid of religion-based rhetoric.

During the reporting period, the government of Maharashtra took no action on regional Shiv Sena party chief Bal Thackeray for his June 2008 remarks advocating creation of "Hindu suicide squads" to fight "Islamic terrorism."

Christian church groups alleged attempts by Karnataka state police to gather information on their pastorates under the guise of providing official sanction to functions in their local areas. For example, on September 26, 2008, a police notice asked Christian prayer groups in Moodabidri police station's jurisdiction in Mangalore for documentation pertaining to building ownership, activities, and membership. Christian groups feared the information would be passed to Hindu extremist groups planning to organize anti-Christian violence.

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) in 2008 issued notices to church authorities for the demolition of St. Anthony Church in Mettuguda. The Catholic Association of Hyderabad, United Front for Dalit Christian Rights, and other Christian associations alleged state government discrimination against the church. The Government of Andhra Pradesh refuted the allegations, noting that the proposed demolition was intended to widen the adjacent road. The GHMC offered monetary compensation, but the Christian community refused and instead demanded nearby land to rebuild the church.

INDIA

Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including ones with religious affiliations.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While there were no reports accusing the National Government of committing abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists criticized it for alleged indifference and inaction toward abuses state and local authorities and private citizens committed. Law enforcement and prosecution continued to be weak. This was exacerbated by a low police-to-population ratio, corruption, and an overburdened court system.

On July 27, 2008, Digras and Pusad towns in eastern Maharashtra witnessed Hindu-Muslim clashes over the rumor of an insult to the Qur'an. A secular group alleged that local police joined rioters in attacking Muslim properties. Police firing resulted in the deaths of two persons.

Christian activists alleged that the BJP victory in 2008 state elections in Karnataka dampened police enthusiasm to investigate such incidents in the state. According to a senior Catholic official, the Karnataka police arrested more than 100 Christians who staged protests against attacks on churches in Mangalore on September 15, 2008. Authorities charged them with rioting and obstructing public servants from discharging their duties, a charge that carries a three-year jail sentence. Meanwhile, Bajrang Dal activists who vandalized churches and attacked Christians on September 14, 2008, were charged only with causing a public nuisance, a charge with a standard sentence of detention for one day.

There were reports from faith-based media of approximately 17 cases under state-level "anticonversion" laws and other restrictive laws in Chhattisgarh, MP, and Maharashtra during the reporting period. Of the 17, seven were reports from Chhattisgarh and six from MP. For example:

On May 7, 2009, authorities arrested five Christians in Narsinghpur, MP, on allegations of forced conversions after Hindu extremists entered a prayer meeting attended by members of Jeevan Lal Church and Campus Crusade for Ministry and injured some attendees, according to Compass News Direct. Police arrested the five Christians under Section 295 (A) of the IPC for "malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs."

INDIA

The report did not indicate whether police took action against the Hindu extremists.

On April 15, 2009 in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, police arrested a Christian, Gyan Singh, after four Hindus accused him of conducting forced conversions by inviting them for a prayer meeting. After charging him under sections of the IPC on promoting enmity between different communities, police released him on bail.

On February 25, 2009, police in Bhopal, MP, arrested Pastor Venkata Rao Paulose of the Pentecostal Church of God on charges of "hurting religious sentiments," after RSS and Bajrang Dal members purchased the book *Secularism and Hindutva* outside a school where the pastor had been speaking. On February 19, 2009, the two pastors who had been selling the books were arrested; one was granted bail and the other was moved to another jail. Although Pastor Paulose claimed he did not know who was selling the books, he was held without bail for a week.

On February 17, 2009, in Surguja district of Chhattisgarh, police arrested 11 pastors from the Believers Church under the state's "anticonversion" law after Hindu extremists disrupted a revival meeting. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported it was conducting the meeting with prior permission of the police and the civil administration. Hindu extremists led by local BJP legislative assembly member Renuka Singh attacked the pastors, tore Bibles and banners, and damaged the sound system. Police intervened after persistent calls from local Christian leaders. Police took the victims to the police station "for security measures" but filed charges against them for alleged forceful conversion. The pastors were released on bail on February 18, 2009.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported that on January 5, 2009, police charged the associate pastor and nine other Christians in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh, with damaging or defiling a place of worship. The Christians said they inadvertently left at a picnic site trash that unknown persons later gathered, piled near a Hindu temple, and photographed as evidence of defilement of the temple. Police arrested and the same day released the Christians. The defilement of the temple led to a protest on January 18, 2008, in which Hindus called for the eradication of Christians. Police dispersed the crowds.

On September 5, 2008, approximately 300 Hindus, alleged members of the Bajrang Dal and VHP, reportedly entered a train coach 31 miles outside Chhattisgarh's capital city, Raipur, and forced four sisters from Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, carrying four orphan babies, to disembark. The attackers

INDIA

accused the sisters of attempting to illegally convert the babies. Police did not arrest the attackers but released the sisters after they showed they were taking the children for lawful adoption.

On August 15, 2008, in Ratlam District, MP, a pastor and his wife were arrested for alleged forced conversions at a prayer meeting organized by the Union of Evangelical Students at St. Bartholomew Church. A group of Bajrang Dal members reportedly beat the two, along with World Vision staff and members of Youth with a Mission. Police detained three Christians and charged them with "forcible conversions" before releasing them on bail the next day.

Release International reported that on August 4, 2008, in Jabalpur, MP, a pastor and his wife were arrested and charged under the state's "anticonversion" law after a man baptized there leveled charges of forced conversion and allurement. Police locked the Full Gospel Church of God and placed it under police guard. The pastor and his wife were released from jail two days later.

Numerous cases involved communal attacks on Christians, attacks on their property, and police brutality. In several instances, those attacked were reportedly arrested.

On May 5, 2009, in Nalasopara, Maharashtra, a plainclothes constable led a mob attack on a Christian prayer meeting, according to the State Minorities Commission. The victims reportedly forgave the assailant after he confessed to the attack.

On April 6, 2009, Andhra Pradesh police arrested Pastor Prabhu Dass for allegedly violating "anticonversion" laws in Karimnagar District. He was released on bail on April 9.

On March 5, 2009, a foreign Christian missionary claimed four men in Hyderabad attacked him and took him by force to the local police station.

On November 23, 2008, Hindu extremists attacked nine Christian pastors in Potuluru, Andhra Pradesh, in the presence of police. Police immediately took the attackers into custody but later released them.

The All India Christian Council noted the following major violations of religious freedom during the reporting period. On March 11, 2009, a group of 30 to 40 persons attacked Pastor Erra Krupanamdham of Bethel Church while he was

INDIA

returning from a market. He suffered permanent spinal injuries. The pastor filed a case with police, who arrested one person. On January 16, 2009, Hindu extremists attacked Pastor Yakobu in Karimnagar District. The pastor claimed that when he answered a knock on his door at midnight, six persons rushed in and beat him while shouting that no pastor should live in the village. A complaint was filed with the Potkapaali police station. On December 7, 2008, three Christians, including a pastor, stated they were attacked by RSS activists in Adilabad while they were returning home.

According to local press, Catholic churches across Kerala held protests in 2008 demanding the immediate withdrawal of a controversial elementary school social studies textbook. The Catholic Church argued that the book teaches children atheism and communism. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)-led Left Democratic Front government issued the textbook. Other religious groups, including Muslim organizations and the Hindu Nair Service Society, also demanded the withdrawal of the textbook. In July 2008 the government of Kerala set up an 18-member committee that in October recommended revisions to one controversial chapter rather than withdrawal of the textbook. The government accepted the recommendation and tasked the State Council of Educational Research and Training to revise the chapter. The pages were reprinted and distributed free of cost to students.

On August 8, 2008, 18 years after their acquittal, four Hindus accused in 1984 anti-Sikh riots were sentenced to life imprisonment for killing two Sikh men. In February 2009, in another case, the Delhi High Court acquitted five Hindus due to lack of evidence. On April 2, 2009, the CBI closed the case against Congress Party leader Jagdish Tytler, stating witness evidence was "inconsistent, unreliable, and unworthy of credit." Public outcry and ensuing protests led the Congress Party to withdraw his name as a candidate in the parliamentary elections. An appeal of the CBI decision was at the Supreme Court at the end of the reporting period.

There was continued concern about the Gujarat government's failure to arrest those responsible for the communal violence in 2002. Home Ministry figures indicated that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed and 2,500 others injured. Some NGOs maintained the number of Muslims killed was higher, with estimates from 1,000 to 2,500. There were also reports of rape and molestation of Muslim women. On February 28, 2009, the official death toll rose to 1,272 as 228 persons who had been missing for seven years were officially declared dead.

INDIA

On April 28, 2009, the Supreme Court ordered Gujarat police to register a complaint against Chief Minister Narendra Modi and 60 other high-level officials of the Gujarat government, investigating their role in the riots. The Supreme Court made the ruling after hearing the petition of Zakia Jafri, a survivor of the 2002 violence, who had been trying since June 2006 to register a complaint in Gujarat against state government officials for their alleged complicity. The Supreme Court also asked the Special Investigation Team (SIT) (see below) to investigate the Zakia Jaffri complaint and submit a report by the end of July 2009. At the end of the reporting period, the SIT investigation was still underway.

There were advances in eight high-profile cases, including the 2002 train fire in Godhra, as a result of investigations by the SIT the Supreme Court established in March 2008. The Supreme Court received the SIT's interim report on March 2, 2009, and issued decisions to expedite the judicial process for these cases based on the SIT report. On May 1, 2009, the Supreme Court ordered the Gujarat High Court to set up fast-track courts in Gujarat to hear at least eight high-profile cases. At the end of the reporting period, the process of setting up fast-track courts was underway.

On March 28, 2009, the SIT arrested former Gujarat BJP minister Maya Kodnani and former VHP leader Jaydeep Patel. Charges filed against the two on April 26, 2009, included murder, attempted murder, looting, and rioting relating to the Naroda Gam massacre. Kodnani was also charged with destruction of evidence. Kodnani was the first high-level member of the Gujarat government arrested in relation to the 2002 riots. On May 19, 2009, Kodnani and Patel were released on bail; no date was set for a trial. In September 2008 the SIT arrested 15 others, including a serving district police superintendant, in connection with three high-profile cases (Naroda Gam, Naroda Patiya, and Gulberg Society).

Some high-profile cases resulted in convictions. In January 2008 a Mumbai special court sentenced 11 Hindu rioters and 1 policeman for the gang rape of a Muslim woman, Bilkis Bano, and the killing of several of her family members. The court also acquitted seven defendants, including five policemen and two doctors. In October 2007 a Godhra court in Gujarat sentenced eight persons to life in prison and three others to three years' imprisonment for the 2002 Eral massacre case that left seven persons dead. Twenty-nine persons were acquitted in the case. In 2006 a Mumbai court convicted nine persons for the murder of 14 Muslims in the Best Bakery case and sentenced them to life in prison.

INDIA

The commission the Gujarat government appointed in 2002 to investigate the violence (known most recently as the Nanavati-Mehta Commission) published a report in September 2008 concluding that Muslims in the town of Godhra conspired to start the fire that killed 59 Hindu activists aboard a train in 2002, contrary to the conclusion in the March 2006 report the central government-established commission headed by Justice Banerjee had issued. The Nanavati-Mehta Commission planned to release a second report in December 2009 examining the subsequent violence in the state. The Gujarat High Court initially prevented the release of the Banerjee report to Parliament, but Indian Railways petitioned the Supreme Court for its release; the appeal was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The Central Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) Review Committee in 2005 recommended POTA charges be dropped against many Muslims in connection with the Godhra train fire due to insufficient evidence. In 2007 the central government committee ruled that nearly 100 Muslims held under POTA were entitled to bail. In February 2009 the Gujarat High Court agreed that the original train fire was not an act of terror, and therefore these cases did not fall under the POTA. Despite these rulings, at the end of the reporting period, almost all the accused remained in custody in Gujarat, awaiting trial. The government of Gujarat appealed the High Court's ruling to the Supreme Court.

In 2007 the newsweekly *Tehelka* published secretly recorded interviews in which many of the accused freely admitted their roles as well as police and BJP leadership complicity in the 2002 violence. The CBI inquiry into the *Tehelka* tapes ordered in 2008 was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Several human rights groups believed those responsible for the 2002 violence would largely go unpunished despite sporadic judgments convicting Hindu assailants and the Supreme Court's direct supervision of certain high-profile cases. In its 2006 response to the Supreme Court, the Gujarat police said it would reexamine 1,600 of the 2,108 cases that were closed after the riots. By June 2008 the Gujarat police dropped as many as 1,600 cases without trial, citing unavailability of witnesses. In many cases tried in Gujarat lower courts, the accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence or changes in testimony. Two women's rights activists reported that the National Government had informed a U.N. agency in 2006 that up to that time, only six cases relating to 2002 violence had resulted in convictions, whereas 182 cases had resulted in acquittals. On May 1, 2009, the Supreme Court ordered retrials of all Gujarat cases by fast-track courts in Gujarat and monitoring of the retrials by the SIT.

INDIA

The situation for many persons displaced by the 2002 violence remained unchanged. The NGO Center for Social Justice, which carried out the initial survey of the families for NHRC, confirmed that the situation in the camps as reported in the 2005 survey by the NHRC monitoring committee was essentially unchanged: approximately 4,300 Muslim families (25,000 to 30,000 individuals) were still internally displaced and living in makeshift camps with inadequate infrastructure. Muslims in camps told the NHRC they feared retaliation by Hindu neighbors if they returned to their villages. They also feared Hindu neighbors would pressure them to withdraw the complaints they had filed in connection with the 2002 violence. The NGO also confirmed many poor families in the camps still had not received government food subsidy cards.

Compensation to victims of the violence continued to lag. The compensation package has four components: additional death compensation for next-of-kin in the amount of \$8,333 (Rs. 350,000); compensation for the 2,548 injured persons in the amount of \$2,900 (Rs. 125,000); additional compensation for property damage, 10 times the amount paid by the government of Gujarat; and assistance in finding homes and jobs for victims. The Gujarat government distributed money for death compensation between January and March 2008. After 228 missing persons were declared dead in February 2009, their next of kin also received death compensation payments in March 2009. In May 2008 the central Government announced it was releasing approximately \$80 million (Rs. 3.3 billion) to the government of Gujarat for compensation for injuries and property damage. It was unclear how much of this fund the Gujarat government received and distributed. NGOs working with victims were pursuing a case in the Gujarat High Court to receive full housing compensation at the end of the reporting period.

On July 9, 2008, a magistrate court convicted and sentenced to one year in jail a senior Shiv Sena leader and two others for inciting violence in the 1992-93 communal riots in Mumbai. The men were convicted of "promoting enmity between different religious groups." In December 1992 the senior politician had led a mob of more than 5,000 persons to a temple where provocative speeches were made. In June 2008 a Mumbai court acquitted 12 persons accused in the 1992-93 communal riot cases.

Despite successful state assembly elections in November-December 2008 in Jammu and Kashmir, reports of human rights abuses by security forces, local officials, and separatists continued. It remained difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists were predominantly Muslim, and most of

INDIA

the security forces stationed there were non-Muslim. The majority of the 61,000-member Jammu and Kashmir police force was Muslim. Kashmiri Hindus remained vulnerable to violence. Most lived in refugee camps outside the valley of Kashmir and were awaiting safe return.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs annual report for 2008-09, at the end of the reporting period, approximately 34,878 Pandit families from Jammu and Kashmir were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu, 19,338 families were in Delhi's 14 camps, and the remaining displaced families were scattered across the country. There were a total of 55,456 Kashmiri migrant families living under displaced conditions.

On May 26, 2008, the Jammu and Kashmir government decided to transfer 100 acres of land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB), a government-run organization that oversees an annual Hindu pilgrimage to a shrine in the Himalayas. Separatist leaders accused the National Government and the state government of illegally confiscating public land and settling non-Kashmiris in an attempt to change the demographics in the Muslim-majority state. Peaceful protests by Muslims later turned violent in June when police opened fire, killing two teenagers and injuring more than 70 protestors and police. After the state government revoked the land transfer on June 30, 2008, Hindu groups in the region mounted protests and destroyed 72 homes of Muslims. In August, as protests continued, security forces resorted to firing, causing 55 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Authorities arrested numerous Christians under state-level "anticonversion" laws during the reporting period for allegedly engaging in conversions by force, allurements, or fraud (for more information, see Abuses). Hindu nationalist organizations frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured low-caste Hindus with offers of free education and health care, and these organizations equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians claimed that low-caste Hindus converted of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "reconvert" these new Christians to Hinduism were accompanied by offers of remuneration and thus fraudulent.

INDIA

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

In contrast to previous years, there was not a significant number of attacks, if any, against the Pandit community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Terrorists attempted to provoke interreligious conflict by detonating bombs.

On July 25, 2008, eight bombs killed one person and injured seven in Bangalore. No organization took responsibility; media reports suggested that investigators suspected SIMI and LeT's involvement in these attacks. On September 13, five synchronized bomb blasts exploded throughout New Delhi, killing 30 persons and injuring more than 100. The Indian Mujahideen, an Islamist group, claimed responsibility. Police arrested several suspects. From November 26 to 29, 10 terrorists carried out coordinated attacks across Mumbai and targeted luxury hotels, restaurants, the railway station, a hospital, and a Jewish center. The terrorists killed 173 persons, including several foreigners, and injured at least 308 persons. Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab, the only terrorist captured alive, was tried by a Mumbai court. At the end of the reporting period, his trial was ongoing.

In addition to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, there were bomb blasts in other cities. On September 28, 2008, there was a bomb blast in Malegaon, Maharashtra, outside a building where the banned SIMI previously had its office. The blast killed seven and injured more than 90. In October 2008, the Mumbai Anti-Terrorism Squad arrested members of Abhinav Bharat, a militant Hindu group, for planting the bombs. The accused included a sadhvi, a Hindu holy woman, as well as current and former military officers, all former members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP).

In July 2008, in the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, 16 bombs exploded, killing 57 persons and injuring more than 150 in markets, residential areas, bus stops, and hospitals. There were also bombs found in Surat, Gujarat, but police defused all of these. According to reports, the Indian Mujahideen claimed credit for the blasts and said the attack was retribution for the communal violence in Indore over the Amarnath Shrine issue. Gujarat police claimed that "Indian Mujahideen" was an offshoot of the banned SIMI and arrested 10 SIMI members for the blasts.

Attacks by Hindu extremists in Karnataka garnered significant media attention. During January 2009 Bajrang Dal and Sri Ram Sena activists in the Dakshin Kanana and Udupi districts assaulted Muslim boys found talking to Hindu girls.

INDIA

Attacks usually took place on public transportation, with sympathetic bus drivers allegedly tipping off the attackers about the presence of interfaith couples. On January 24, 2009, Sri Ram Sena raided a Mangalore pub, assaulting women patrons for "indecentcy." The resulting media outcry referred to the emergence of a "Hindu Taliban." On February 7, 2009, Sri Ram Sena members abducted the daughter of a Kerala legislator and a young Muslim man for conversing while traveling on an interstate bus. Five attackers were arrested and released on bail. Human rights groups claimed a case was registered against the attackers, but no charges had been filed in court at the end of the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In the wake of the bomb attacks in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in September 2008, Chief Minister Narendra Modi and State Health and Welfare Minister Jay Narayan Vyas appealed for calm and restraint, helping to prevent communal violence.

Andhra Pradesh (AP) is the first state to allocate funding--\$200,000 (Rs. 10,000,000)--for development programs for the Christian minority and started the AP State Christian Finance Corporation in 2008.

The AP state government quickly responded to communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in Adilabad in October 2008. Thirty cases were registered and 129 persons, mostly Hindus, were arrested. The Chief Minister announced a \$10,000 (Rs. 500,000) relief and rehabilitation package for victims' families and compensation payments between \$1,000-\$8,000 (Rs. 50,000 to 400,000) to those who lost property.

Following objections from Christian groups that the new system of reserving 3.5 percent of jobs and educational opportunities for Christians was not advantageous to the community, the Tamil Nadu Assembly on November 14, 2008, withdrew the new policy and reestablished the Christians' right to share quotas alongside the Hindu members of the "backward classes."

The AP government allocated \$474,000 (Rs. 20,145,000) in the 2008 budget as subsidies to Christians who wanted to visit the Holy Land. Two groups, with 50 persons each, received the subsidies in 2008.

In July 2008 the National Commission for Minorities ordered the MP government to investigate the riots between Hindus and Muslims over the Jammu and Kashmir Amarnath land transfer issue. Eight persons were killed in the riots. The NCM

INDIA

held Hindu fundamentalist organizations Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad responsible for the rioting and deaths.

In January 2009 a Special Court awarded life sentences to 62 persons convicted for the May 2003 communal attack in Marad that left nine persons dead.

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Home Affairs, continued to provide assistance for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of child victims of communal, caste, ethnic, or terrorist violence, with special reference to their care, education, and training. The NFCH also promoted communal harmony, fraternity, and national integration by providing financial assistance to rehabilitate minority children. It gave grants to states to hold events that promote communal harmony. The NFCH granted scholarships, fellowships, and annual awards to individuals, organizations, and student unions that reflected a secular image and promoted harmony.

In September 2008 the Bihar government provided compensation to approximately 600 of 853 victims of the 1989 Bhagalpur riots. Some victims did not receive compensation because of a lack of evidence or missing files.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the reporting period. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions. For example, the NCM visited Indore after the July 2008 Hindu-Muslim violence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The population of 1.1 billion includes numerous religious traditions and beliefs. There were instances of societal discrimination and violence based in whole or in part on religious affiliation. Many such incidents were linked to politics, nationalism, conversion, or retaliation. Economic competition for limited resources between religious communities played an important role in conflicts. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs 2008-09 annual report, there were 943 instances of communal violence or violence along religious lines, in which 167 persons were killed and 2,354 injured.

Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. Prominent leaders of all religious groups made public efforts to show respect for other religious groups by celebrating their holidays and attending

INDIA

social events such as weddings. Muslim groups protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in places such as Gujarat.

In the aftermath of the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist strikes, religious leaders of all communities condemned the attacks and issued statements to maintain communal harmony. In January 2009 a Christian and Muslim were awarded the 2008 National Communal Harmony Award by Vice President Hamid Ansari.

The media continued to highlight discrimination in several villages in southern Tamil Nadu preventing Dalits from participating in temple festivities. Local media also pointed out that Dalits are usually denied access to burial grounds or even to public streets dominated by certain upper castes.

There were instances of religiously motivated violence and sectarian rioting, including mob violence or vigilante action.

Religious media reported that on March 15, 2009, more than 20 Hindu RSS activists attacked evangelist O.J. Andrews, a worker of the organization Tribal Mission, while he was conducting a Sunday worship service in his church in Karullai, Kerala. Andrews was reportedly pulled out of the church and dragged for 30 yards along the road. Two days later Andrews lodged a complaint with the police, but he withdrew it after the police mediated peace talks between the groups.

On October 10, 2008, Bhainsa, a communally sensitive town in Adilabad District, Andhra Pradesh, had an outbreak of communal violence, when a procession to immerse a Hindu idol in a local reservoir sparked violence between Hindus and Muslims that resulted in the deaths of two Muslims and one Hindu. The incident also resulted in 12 other injuries, including nine police officers, and the destruction by arson of 20 shops and 10 vehicles. Local residents blamed police for not taking measures to prevent violence.

On October 12, 2008, the charred bodies of Mahbub Khan and five members of his family were found in his house in Vatoli, a village near Bhainsa. The door had been locked from outside and the house set on fire. The family was one of two Muslim families in the village. The National Commission for Minorities suspected murder, since neighbors made no efforts to put out the fire or save the persons inside.

INDIA

After the violence in Bhainsa and Vatoli, the state government ordered additional police forces to investigate. Authorities confirmed a total of 30 cases and arrested and declared "non-bailable" 129 individuals in conjunction with both incidents, with the majority of the cases filed against Hindus. Authorities arrested seven individuals for the Vatoli arson and 13 for the Bhainsa violence.

The AP state government announced a relief and rehabilitation package worth \$10,000 (Rs. 500,000), including government jobs, for the victims' next of kin. Those who lost property were granted compensation payments of \$1,000 - \$8,000 (Rs. 50,000 to 400,000). The state government also requested a Central Bureau of Investigation probe into both incidents.

In Hindu-Muslim violence October 5-6, 2008, in Dhule, a town in northern Maharashtra, there were 10 persons reported killed, 383 injured, and 1,157 homes damaged. The violence allegedly began when Muslims gathered to welcome a local Congress leader returning from the Hajj hurled stones at Hindu posters that depicted bombings allegedly perpetrated by Muslim terrorists. Police did not intercede to stop the violence until the third day, according to reports.

There were reports of communal clashes in Vadodora, Gujarat, on September 14-15, 2008, when Hindus parading Hindu idols through a mixed Muslim/Hindu neighborhood hurled stones at Muslims. According to the reports, police used tear gas to disperse the crowd; after the violence continued for a second day, police fired into the crowd, killing one Muslim.

On August 30, 2008, a group of approximately 1,000 VHP activists gathered at a diocese-run school in Jabalpur, MP, shouted anti-Christian slogans, and burned an effigy of Pope Benedict XVI. No violence was reported.

On July 3, 2008, communal clashes were reported in the city of Indore, MP, when Muslim shopkeepers refused to close their businesses for a strike the BJP and VHP called to protest the Amarnath Shrine issue. (Amarnath is a popular Hindu pilgrimage destination in Jammu and Kashmir. The protests were called in opposition to revocation of an order transferring land to the Amarnath Shrine Trust after opposition by Kashmir's Muslims.) Four persons died from police firing during efforts to quell the altercations.

The Mumbai-based Center for the Study of Society and Secularism published a report on Hindu-Muslim violence in 2008 compiled from mainstream and faith-based media reports. Findings include: On December 29, 2008, two persons died

INDIA

in Hindu-Muslim clashes in a village in Latur district of Maharashtra. On October 10, 2008, in Burhanpur in MP, rioting started after Friday prayers near Jama Masjid when Hindus used provocative slogans. Three persons died in police firing, and rioters burned 18 shops and 15 houses. On October 1, 2008, in Maharashtra, Hindus and Muslims clashed over erecting a ceremonial arch for the temporary installation of a Hindu idol. One Muslim died in police firing, and 65 persons were injured, including 39 policemen. Rioters burned three shops on temple and mosque premises, and one person was killed when police fired on rioters. A Hindu leader was arrested for not ending the procession before it became violent. On August 14, 2008, in Tenkasi, Tamil Nadu, Hindus attacked and killed six Muslims suspected of killing a Hindu right-wing group leader in December 2007.

Conversion of Hindus or members of lower castes to Christianity remained highly sensitive and resulted in assaults and/or arrests of Christians. Even so, Christians often held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests.

The AICC documented 73 attacks on Christians, not counting attacks in Karnataka and Orissa.

According to AICC, the greatest number of reported attacks occurred in Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and MP. In these incidents, Christians alleged Hindu extremists disrupted prayer meetings, destroyed or damaged places of worship, vandalized property, assaulted pastors and lay persons, confiscated and destroyed religious material, and attempted to intimidate Christians from attending religious services. There were also reported incidents in which Christians physically attacked by others were further victimized when the police arrested them rather than the attackers.

On October 10, 2008, Hindu groups in Goa called a strike in protest of desecration of Hindu idols. No culprits were identified in the case of damage to small Hindu shrines in the Goan countryside.

Faith-based media outlets reported Hindu extremists attacked Christian prayer meetings or Christian individuals in MP, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra. Christians alleged that Hindu groups, such as Dharma Sena or the Dharm Raksha Sena (Religion Protection Army) (DRS), disrupted prayer meetings, assaulted pastors and lay persons, and confiscated and destroyed religious material.

INDIA

In Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, MP, Maharashtra, and Orissa, Christians claimed that authorities filed false charges of conversion by force and allurement and that the police were biased in registering complaints, doing so promptly only when the accused was a Christian.

On May 6, 2009, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, in the Nallasopara suburb of Mumbai, Maharashtra, members of a Hindu Group, Swami Narendra Maharaj Sansthan, attacked a Christian prayer meeting and injured Pastor James Samuel and 10 worshippers. The attackers forced the Christians at the prayer meeting to chant a Hindu religious cheer. Police arrested five attackers and charged them with rioting.

On May 3, 2009, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, 15 Hindus attacked a prayer meeting in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, burned Bibles and Christian literature, broke household goods, uttered verbal abuse, and threatened the group with dire consequences if they continued their religious gatherings. The police registered a complaint but did not arrest anyone.

On April 20, 2009, in Durg District, Chhattisgarh, local Sikhs assaulted visiting Christian pastors from New Delhi who were converts from Sikhism. The Sikhs were offended that the converts still had long hair and beards, the cultural/religious symbols of Sikhism. The Sikhs accused the pastors of causing division within the local Sikh community and demanded their arrest. Police rescued the pastors and put them on the train to New Delhi but did not take action against the attackers.

On April 19, 2009, according to the *Times of India*, 25 Hindu extremists vandalized a 100-year-old church in Saoner, 25 miles from Nagpur, Maharashtra. During Sunday Mass, they tore up several religious books including the sanctuary Bible and committed other vandalism. The priest and two believers received minor injuries. Nagpur district police arrested seven persons, including two members of the VHP and Bajrang Dal.

The *Times of India* reported that on January 26, 2009, Hindu extremists in the Nasik District of Maharashtra disrupted a baptism at Navjivan Fellowship Church and beat those present.

On August 10, 2008, three Hindu extremists allegedly assaulted a pastor from the Indian Full Gospel Church in a village in the Rajnandgaon District of Chhattisgarh. Hindu extremists repeatedly kicked and punched the pastor, accusing him of conducting forced conversions. The pastor later filed a complaint against the

INDIA

extremists at the local police station, but withdrew it once the extremists agreed not to harass the Christians in the village.

According to religious media, there were reported acts of violence during the reporting period against Christians in the state of Karnataka. Religious press reported injuries to pastors and congregants (male and female), threats and intimidation, and destruction of property and places of worship. Attackers disrupted prayer meetings and church services.

There were numerous reports of violence against Christians in Maharashtra.

In Kandhamal, Orissa State, individuals affiliated with left-wing Maoist extremists killed Hindu religious leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) workers on August 23, 2008. Although ultraleft Maoists claimed responsibility, the murders exacerbated underlying socio-economic tensions between the dalits and the tribals and unleashed a wave of revenge killings, assaults, and property destruction. According to widely accepted government statistics, 40 persons died and 134 were injured; most of the victims were Christians. The large-scale violence, which included the August 25 alleged rape of a Christian nun, attracted worldwide media attention. The central Government sent 39 companies of paramilitary forces to restore peace and security. State authorities established 18 emergency camps to house displaced persons, worked with NGOs to deliver assistance and relief to victims, and allocated funds to compensate next of kin and repair damaged houses, businesses, and places of worship. The police arrested 1,200 persons and registered more than 1,000 criminal cases. On April 21, 2009, police arrested Maoist leader P. Rama Rao in connection with Saraswati's murder. According to several independent accounts, an estimated 3,200 refugees remained in relief camps, down from 24,000 in the immediate aftermath of the violence.

In March 2009 Orissa's ruling party, Biju Janata Dal, terminated its 11-year alliance with its coalition partner, the BJP, reportedly in part over differences in responding to the Kandhamal violence. The state government, supplemented by central police, ensured that all communities in Kandhamal were able to freely and fairly exercise their franchise in April 2009 state and parliamentary elections. Since the reelection of the Biju Janata Dal Party, without its former coalition partner, the state government has worked with the central government to rebuild communities in Kandhamal both through infrastructure improvements and peace councils with various stakeholders. In June 2009 the central Government

INDIA

disbursed \$ 300,000 (Rs. 14,648,437) compensation to the next of kin of 35 Kandhamal riot victims.

Faith-based media documented acts of vandalism against religious properties during the reporting period. Faith-based groups reported seven such attacks, including several cases of arson in the western part of the country. In most cases, police registered a complaint but made no arrests.

On April 19, 2009, in Saoner, Maharashtra, approximately 20 Bajrang Dal members armed with sticks vandalized Douglas Memorial Church during a service.

On October 22, 2008, in Tikamgarh District, MP, arsonists attacked a Catholic church. Police helped to extinguish the fire, and a complaint was lodged.

On September 18, 2008, in Jabalpur District, MP, Dharam Sena members set on fire Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral. Police conducted an investigation.

On September 13, 2008, in Indore, MP, Hindu extremists allegedly set a church on fire. A complaint was filed with the police.

On September 7, 2008, in Ratlam District, MP, alleged members of the Bajrang Dal and VHP burned a church. A complaint was filed, but there were no arrests.

On August 29, 2008, in Gwalior District, MP, members of VHP and Bajrang Dal targeted four schools (Carmel Convent School, St. Teresa's School, St. Paul School, and St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran School) with verbal abuse and vandalism. Fast police response limited damage, and the attacks were investigated. The outcome of the investigations was unknown.

On July 3, 2008, in Dindori District, MP, Hindu fundamentalists including two police constables entered the houses of several Christians, tearing up religious pictures and burning Bibles.

There were no reported incidents of forced reconversions of Christian tribals to Hinduism during the reporting period. According to the Christian Legal Association, in 2008 60 families were reconverted to Hinduism in Himachal Pradesh; no complaint was filed under the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act.

INDIA

Discrimination based on caste is officially illegal but remained prevalent, especially in rural areas, where low-caste Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh Dalits faced impediments to social advancement. Some Dalits who sought to convert out of a desire to escape discrimination and violence encountered hostility and backlash from upper castes.

Despite government measures, the practice of dedicating Devadasis reportedly continued in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis are young, generally prepubescent girls who are dedicated to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god." They may not marry, must live apart from their families, and are required to provide sexual services to priests and others. Reportedly, many Devadasis eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped. Estimates of the number of Devadasis in the country varied; in Karnataka, media sources reported as few as 23,000 and as many as 100,000. The Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation claims to have enumerated 22,873 Devadasis in the state and to have rehabilitated 11,342 Devadasis by providing them seed capital to set up small businesses.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy and the four U.S. consulates continued to promote religious freedom through discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The Embassy and consulates also regularly met with civil society activists and religious leaders and reported on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the embassy community celebrated Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the reporting period with members of the various religious communities. The Embassy and consulates also hosted and attended Iftars during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Mission officers met regularly with religious leaders to learn more about their beliefs and their relationships with other religious communities.

Throughout the reporting period, mission officers investigated and reported on numerous cases of alleged religious persecution, ongoing cases in Gujarat, attacks

INDIA

against Christians in Orissa, discrimination against Dalits, and religiously motivated attacks by militants and terrorists.

Mission officers also monitored the plight of internally displaced Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, who fled their home areas in the valley of Kashmir starting in 1989 due to attacks by terrorists seeking to drive out non-Muslims.

Embassy officers regularly met with commissioners from the NHRC and NCM regarding actions by the state government that were injurious to the free exercise of belief by religious minorities.

During the reporting period, embassy and consulate officials met with leaders of all significant religious minority communities to discuss religious freedom concerns. The NGO and missionary communities in the country were extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers met regularly with local NGOs.

The U.S. Government continued to express concern over the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 and urged the perpetrators of the violence to be brought to justice. Consulate and senior embassy officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the Gujarat violence. The Embassy and consulates reached out to madrassahs directly and through special International Visitor Leadership Programs; religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity were topics of discussion.

INDONESIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. The Government officially recognized only six religions, and legal restrictions continued on certain types of religious activity.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, ongoing government restrictions, particularly among unrecognized religions and sects of the recognized religions considered "deviant" were significant exceptions to respect for religious freedom. Since the previous reporting period the Government convicted and sentenced the leaders of a hardline Muslim organization to 18 months in prison, including time served, for their role in organized violence against a peaceful demonstration in support of religious freedom. The Government also prosecuted terrorists responsible for religiously tinged violence in Sulawesi and the Malukus. In some cases, however, the Government tolerated discrimination against and the abuse of religious groups by private actors and failed to punish perpetrators, although the Government prevented several vigilante actions during Ramadan. Aceh remained the only province authorized to implement Islamic law (Shari'a), although non-Muslims in the province are exempted from Shari'a. Many local governments outside of Aceh maintained laws with elements of Shari'a that abrogated certain rights of women and religious minorities; however, no new laws based on Shari'a were known to have passed during the reporting period. Even though the central Government holds authority over religious matters, it did not try to overturn any local laws that restricted rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Members of minority religious groups continued to experience some official discrimination in the form of administrative difficulties, often in the context of civil registration of marriages and births or the issuance of identity cards.

There were a number of reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Some groups used violence and intimidation to forcibly shut at least nine churches and 12 Ahmadiyya mosques. Some of the churches remained closed and one Ahmadiyya mosque in Riau that was completely destroyed had not been rebuilt. Other mosques were reopened. Many perpetrators of past abuse against religious minorities were not brought to justice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with government and civil society leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy

promoted religious freedom and tolerance through exchanges and civil society development.

Section I. Religious Demography

An archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, the country has an area of approximately 700,000 square miles and a population of 245 million.

According to a 2000 census report, 88 percent of the population is Muslim, 6 percent Protestant, 3 percent Roman Catholic, 2 percent Hindu, and in total less than 1 percent Buddhist, followers of traditional indigenous religions, Jewish, and other Christian denominations. Some Christians, Hindus, and members of other minority religious groups argued that the census undercounted non-Muslims.

Most Muslims in the country are Sunni. The two largest Muslim social organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, claimed 40 million and 30 million Sunni followers, respectively. There are also an estimated 1 million to 3 million Shi'a.

Many smaller Muslim organizations exist, including approximately 400,000 persons who subscribe to the Ahmadiyya Qadiyani interpretation of Islam. A smaller group, known as Ahmadiyya Lahore, is also present. Other Islamic minorities include al-Qiyadah al-Islamiya, Darul Arqam, Jamaah Salamulla (Salamulla Congregation), and members of the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that 19 million Protestants (referred to locally as Christians) and 8 million Catholics live in the country. The province of East Nusa Tenggara has the highest proportion of Catholics at 55 percent. The province of Papua contains the highest proportion of Protestants at 58 percent. Other areas, such as the Maluku Islands and North Sulawesi, host sizable Christian communities.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that 10 million Hindus live in the country. Hindus account for approximately 90 percent of the population in Bali. Hindu minorities (called "Keharingan") reside in Central and East Kalimantan, the city of Medan (North Sumatra), South and Central Sulawesi, and Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara). Hindu groups such as Hare Krishna and followers of the Indian spiritual leader Sai Baba are also present, although in smaller numbers. Some indigenous religious groups, including the "Naurus" on Seram Island in Maluku

Province, incorporate Hindu and animist beliefs into their practices. Many have also adopted some Protestant principles. The Tamil community in Medan represents another concentration of Hindus.

The country has a small Sikh population, estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000. Sikhs reside primarily in Medan and Jakarta. Eight Sikh temples (gurdwaras) are located in North Sumatra, while Jakarta has two Sikh temples with active congregations.

Among Buddhists, approximately 60 percent follow the Mahayana school, Theravada followers account for 30 percent, and the remaining 10 percent belong to the Tantrayana, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Nichiren, or Maitreya schools. According to the Young Generation of Indonesian Buddhists, most believers live in Java, Bali, Lampung, West Kalimantan, and the Riau islands. Ethnic Chinese make up an estimated 60 percent of Buddhists.

The number of Confucians remains unknown because at the time of the 2000 national census, respondents were not allowed to identify themselves as such. The Supreme Council for Confucian Religion in Indonesia (MATAKIN) estimated that ethnic Chinese made up 95 percent of Confucians with the balance mostly indigenous Javanese. Many Confucians also practiced Buddhism and Christianity.

An estimated 20 million persons in Java, Kalimantan, Papua, and elsewhere practice animism and other types of traditional belief systems termed "Aliran Kepercayaan." Many of these persons combine their beliefs with one of the government-recognized religions and are thus registered as following a recognized religion.

There are very small Jewish communities in Jakarta and Surabaya. The Baha'i community reported thousands of members, but no reliable figures were available. Falun Dafa, which considers itself a spiritual organization rather than a religion, claims between 2,000 and 3,000 followers, nearly half of whom live in Yogyakarta, Bali, and Medan.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and accords "all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief." The Constitution states

that "the nation is based upon belief in one supreme God." The first tenet of the country's national ideology, Pancasila, similarly declares belief in one God. Government employees must swear allegiance to the nation and to the Pancasila ideology. Other laws and policies placed some restrictions on certain types of religious activity, particularly among unrecognized religious groups and "deviant" sects of recognized religious groups. The Government did not use its constitutional authority to review or revoke local laws that violated freedom of religion.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs extends official status to six religious groups: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Unrecognized groups may register with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as social organizations. Although these groups have the right to establish a house of worship, obtain identity cards, and register marriages and births, they face administrative difficulties in doing so. In some cases these challenges make it more difficult for individuals to seek employment or enroll children in school.

In June 2008 the Government released a joint ministerial decree freezing the activities of the Ahmadiyya Qadiyani (Ahmadiyya), banning proselytizing by the Ahmadiyya, and prohibiting vigilantism against the group. The decree is short of the outright ban strongly advocated for by hardline groups and a government-appointed body, the Coordinating Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society (Bakor Pakem). The decree was signed by the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Religion, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Minister of Religious Affairs stated that violations of the ban on proselytizing would result in a maximum 5-year jail sentence on charges of blasphemy. The decree does not prohibit the Ahmadiyya from worshipping or continuing to practice within its own community.

Following the decree's release, the Government issued a joint circulatory letter providing the executive guidance on the joint ministerial decree on Ahmadiyya. The letter was signed by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Religion, the Assistant Attorney General for Intelligence, and the Director General for National Integration and Internal Politics at the Ministry of Home Affairs. The letter provides guidance for Governors, Regents, Mayors, Heads of the High Court, and Heads of Regional Offices under the Provincial Ministries of Religion throughout the country on proper implementation of the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB).

Prior to the government decree, Bakor Pakem issued a recommendation to the Government to dissolve the Ahmadiyya. The April 2008 recommendation

declared the group heretical and deviant, citing a 1965 presidential instruction on the "prevention of misuse and disgrace of religion." The Government delayed action on issuing a formal decree against the group amid pressure from civil society and Islamic organizations that claim the ban would be unconstitutional and contrary to the teachings of Islam.

The Indonesian Council of Ulamas (MUI) released a number of fatwas (religious decrees) in recent years on the issue of "deviance" from mainstream Islam, including recommendations to ban the Ahmadiyya, that were influential in enabling official and social discrimination against the Ahmadiyya and other minority religious groups during the reporting period.

The Government formed the MUI in 1975 and continued to fund its members, but MUI opinions are not legally binding. Nevertheless, the MUI's edicts or fatwas are designed to be moral guiding principles for Muslims and society, and the Government seriously considers them when making decisions or drafting legislation. MUI's influence in restricting religious freedoms increased during the year, sometimes with government support.

In 2007 MUI issued a fatwa with 10 guidelines for determining deviant teachings. These include disagreeing with any of the six core principles of Islam; acknowledging a prophet after Muhammad; and changing or modifying Islamic rituals such as performing the Hajj to a place other than Mecca or saying that prayer five times daily is not necessary. In October 2007 the MUI declared the minority sect, al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah deviant. It issued a similar fatwa against the Ahmadiyya in 2005.

The 2006 civil registration bill requires citizens to identify their religion on National Identity Cards (KTP). The bill does not allow citizens to identify themselves as anything outside of the six recognized religious groups. Legally, citizens may leave the religious section blank, but some local government officials were not familiar with this option. Members of unrecognized religious groups were often unable to obtain KTPs as a result.

The Government requires officially recognized religious groups to comply with Ministry of Religious Affairs and other ministerial directives, such as the Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship (2006), Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (1978), and Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion (1978).

The 2006 Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship requires religious groups that want to build a house of worship to obtain the signatures of at least 90 members of the group and 60 persons of other religious groups in the community stating that they support the construction. The decree also requires obtaining approval from the local religious affairs office, the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB).

The Guidelines for Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions require domestic religious organizations to obtain approval from the Ministry of Religion to receive funding from overseas donors. The Guidelines for Propagation of Religion ban proselytizing under most circumstances.

The Government permits the practice of the traditional belief system of Aliran Kepercayaan as a cultural manifestation, not a religion. Aliran Kepercayaan groups must register with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Local authorities generally respect these adherents' right to practice. On June 28, 2007, the Government issued Regulation No. 37/2007, which allows Aliran Kepercayaan officials to preside over marriage ceremonies and directs civil registration offices to register marriage licenses signed by such marriage officials, enabling these marriages to be legally recognized. The regulation was not implemented in all areas, however. At the end of the reporting period, the Surabaya Citizenship Department was waiting for either revision of the local regulation on civil administration and marriage or technical guidance from the Minister of Home Affairs before implementing the law.

The Child Protection Act of 2002 makes attempting to convert minors to a religion other than their own through "tricks" and/or "lies" a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

Article 156 of the Criminal Code makes spreading hatred, heresy, and blasphemy punishable by up to five years in prison. Although the law applies to all officially recognized religions, the few cases in which it has been enforced have almost always involved blasphemy and heresy against Islam.

Many of the country's policies concerning religion are enacted and enforced at the subnational level. Since October 2005 the regional representative office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in West Nusa Tenggara upheld a ban on 13 religious groups, including the Ahmadiyya, Jehovah's Witness, Hare Krishna, and 10 forms of Aliran Kepercayaan as being deviations of Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism. The West Nusa Tenggara Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society closely

monitored Ahmadiyya members in Mataram during the reporting period. There were no reports, however, on how the restriction affects the other banned groups in the region. In West Java a joint decree issued in January 2005 in the Kuningan Regency restricts the propagation of Ahmadiyya teachings. On May 5, 2008, Pakem West Java recommended municipal authorities ban Ahmadiyya. On May 6, 2008, the Mayor of Cimahi, West Java, issued an order banning the religious group.

Aceh remained the only province for which the central Government specifically authorized Shari'a law. Presidential Decree 11/2003 formally implemented Shari'a law and established Shari'a courts in Aceh. Since that time the provincial government has passed three Shari'a laws, one governing relations between members of the opposite sex, and two others to ban alcohol consumption and gambling. Christians and other non-Muslims are specifically exempted. By 2008 many districts had disbanded the vice patrols, better known as Wilayatul Hisbah (WH) which were originally established in 2005 in districts around the province. A new provincial government was installed in early 2007 and has steadily cut back on the enforcement of Shari'a law. Even in areas where the WH continued to operate, their influence was substantially less because of new regulations limiting their authority.

Although not specifically classified as Shari'a ordinances, many local governments across the country follow Shari'a as the inspiration for their ordinances. According to the Indonesian Women's Coalition, local governments throughout the country have issued at least 100 such ordinances. Many Muslim scholars and human rights activists claim that these ordinances create or increase discrimination against women. In many cases these laws require Muslim women to wear headscarves in public; mandate elected Muslim officials, students, civil servants, and individuals seeking marriage licenses to be able to read the Qur'an in Arabic; and prohibit Muslims from drinking alcohol and gambling. Some of these laws are attempts to deal with local social problems, and in many cases the laws are not enforced.

Civil rights activists assert that Shari'a-based ordinances violate the Constitution and have called on the Government to exercise its constitutional jurisdiction to revoke or review these ordinances. In February 2008 the Minister of Home Affairs claimed Shari'a bylaws do not exist and that the so-called Shari'a-inspired ordinances are merely public order laws passed to deal with social problems such as drinking and prostitution. With regard to Aceh, the Minister stated that the disputed regulations only applied to Muslims, obliging them to conduct their daily lives in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Several local governments maintain regulations preventing Muslim women from receiving government services if they are not wearing headscarves, although they are not enforced.

Several regencies in South Sulawesi have Shari'a laws on the books. In Bulukumba Regency, the laws, which apply only to Muslims, include obligatory Islamic dress, a requirement to read the Qur'an in Arabic, regulations on tithing, and a ban on liquor. In most cases there are no sanctions for noncompliance, and the laws are not enforced.

A 2002 regulation in the Pamekasan Regency of Madura, called Gerbang Salamor Islamic Society Development Movement, calls for Muslim civil servants to wear Islamic attire and the cessation of both public and work activities during the call to prayer. The regulation was issued following requests from the Pamekasan clerics to encourage Muslims to implement Islamic values in daily life. Reportedly, however, not all residents obey this regulation, and there are no clear sanctions for noncompliance.

Tangerang City in Banten Province bans prostitution and public displays of affection. These bans apply to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The controversial prostitution clause vaguely defines a prostitute as anyone drawing suspicion based on his or her attitude, behavior, or dress, and places the burden on suspected women to prove their innocence. However, the ban is no longer implemented, according to rights activists.

The 1974 Marriage Law makes polygamy illegal for civil servants, except in limited circumstances. Marriage law for Muslims draws from Shari'a and allows a man to have up to four wives, provided he is able to support each equally. For a man to take a second, third, or fourth wife, he must obtain court permission and the consent of the first wife; however, these conditions are not always required in practice. Many women reportedly encounter societal pressures that make permission difficult to refuse, and Islamic women's groups remain divided over whether the system needs revision. In October 2007 the Constitutional Court upheld a spouse's right to deny a husband's demand to take on additional wives, ruling that restrictions on polygamy in the Marriage Law violate neither the Constitution nor tenets of Islam and are necessary to protect the rights of women.

The President signed the antipornography legislation into law on December 8, 2008. The bill outlaws pornographic acts and images, broadly defining

pornography as "man-made sexual materials in the form of drawings, sketches, illustrations, photographs, text, voice, sound, moving pictures, animation, cartoons, poetry, conversations, and gestures." It also outlaws public performances which could "incite sexual desire." Some provinces refuse to implement the anti-pornography law on grounds that it limits religious and cultural expression. Currently, the Constitutional Court is reviewing the law after a coalition of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) challenged its constitutionality.

Divorce remains a legal option available to members of all religions, but Muslims seeking divorce generally have to turn to the Islam-based family court system while non-Muslims obtain a divorce through the national court system. In divorce cases women often bear a heavier evidentiary burden than men, especially in the Islam-based family court system. The law requires the former husband to provide alimony or its equivalent, but no enforcement mechanism exists, and divorced women rarely receive such support.

Based on Law 17/1999, the Government has a monopoly on organizing the Hajj to Mecca. The law states that the Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for providing guidance, service, and protection to Hajj pilgrims during their pilgrimage. The Ministry also determines the costs associated with the Hajj and issues a Hajj passport.

In April 2008 the House of Representatives passed a bill reaffirming the Government's role as the single Hajj organizer. Despite many complaints from various sides about alleged corruption, poor management, and inadequate service, the new law states the Ministry of Religious Affairs will continue to manage the pilgrimage. The law requires the Government to form an independent supervisory committee to monitor the Hajj management. The Indonesian Hajj Supervisory Committee would consist of nine members--three government officials and the remaining six from other institutions, including the MUI. The three government officials on the committee would be comprised of members from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Health Ministry, and the Indonesian Embassy in Saudi Arabia.

In 2007 the President signed the National Education Law, originally passed by the Government in 2003. The Education Law mandates religious instruction in any one of the six official religions when requested by a student.

The Government bans proselytizing, arguing that such activity, especially in religiously diverse areas, could prove disruptive.

Religious speeches are permissible if they are delivered to members of the same religious group and are not intended to convert persons of other religious groups.

Televised religious programming remains unrestricted, and viewers can watch religious programs offered by any of the recognized religious groups.

No restrictions exist on the publication of religious materials or the use of religious symbols; however, the Government bans dissemination of these materials to persons of other religious groups.

Religious groups and social organizations must obtain permits to hold religious concerts or other public events. The Government usually grants permits in an unbiased manner unless a concern exists that the activity could anger members of another religious group in the area.

Foreign missionaries must obtain religious worker visas, and foreign religious organizations must obtain permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to provide any type of assistance (in-kind, personnel, or financial) to local religious groups.

The law does not discriminate against any religious group in employment, housing, or health care.

The Government observes the Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Muslim New Year, Good Friday, the Ascension of Christ, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Christmas, the Buddhist holiday Waisak, the Chinese New Year (celebrated by Confucians and other Chinese), and the Hindu holiday Nyepi as national holidays. Additional Hindu holy days are recognized as regional holidays in Bali, and Balinese do not work on Saraswati Day, Galungan, and Kuningan.

During the reporting period, several government officials and prominent political leaders interacted in public forums and seminars with religious leaders and interfaith groups such as Muhammadiyah's International Peace Forum and various seminars sponsored by the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), and the Wahid Institute.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom; however, a government decree restricting the ability of the Ahmadiyya to practice freely was a significant exception. Certain other laws, policies, and official actions also restricted religious freedom and the Government sometimes tolerated private actors' discrimination against and abuse of individuals based on their religious belief.

Local governments issued bans against Ahmadiyya, al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah, and other minority Islamic sects during the reporting period and monitored them closely, frequently at the request of local MUI chapters.

In September 2008 the acting Governor of South Sumatra issued a governor's decree banning Ahmadiyya. The decree stated that "the Ahmadiyya would be prohibited in the province because the sect is not compatible with Islamic teachings." The local ban was supported by officials from the provincial offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, local prosecutors, representatives from the local MUI and other Islamic organizations, including academics from Palembang-based Raden Fatah State Islamic Institute. Before the ban, several conservative groups under the umbrella organization Islamic People's Forum (FUI), including the Islam Defenders Front (FPI) and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, along with Hizbuth Tahrir Indonesia, a transnational organization, demanded the dissolution of the Ahmadiyya sect.

Despite the South Sumatra decree's violation of the June 2008 central Government decree and guidance on Ahmadiyya, the central Government has taken no action to demand it be rescinded. The decree remains in place, but no efforts have been made to enforce it and local authorities consider that the decree has no force of law, given that the acting Governor was only in power for three months. The Ahmadiyya community reports that it is still able to perform its usual and normal religious activities in the province.

The June 2008, government decree on Ahmadiyya that bans proselytizing and practices deemed to be "deviant" from mainstream Islam came five months after a government-appointed team began monitoring the Ahmadiyya at the request of MUI. Civil society activists have said that passage of the decree was the most recent example of an escalating effort by Islamic hardliners to restrict the practice of the Ahmadiyya.

Other religious minorities also faced restrictions during the reporting period. In February 2009 the local Indonesian Ulema Council in Jombang (MUI) declared that "Noto Ati" (or managing heart) teachings are heretical because they violate the

teachings of the Koran and Hadith and because the group believed that the end of the world would come on January 15, 2009. The MUI in Blitar, East Java, banned six such "heretical" teachings over the past eight years that instructed its followers to pay \$400 (4 million rupiah) for a ticket to heaven. However, the leader of the "road to heaven" teachings, Suliani, argued that the \$400 was a compensation for her prayer and advice to her followers.

On May 7, 2009, members of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP) congregation filed a lawsuit and appealed to the Bandung State Administrative Court to cancel a municipal order revoking their church permit. Although the congregation obtained a permit and began construction, the mayor revoked the permit on March 27, 2009, citing residential complaints. During construction, there were several unresolved attacks on the HKBP church, including one in October 2008.

In Bukittinggi a ban on the celebration of Valentine's Day in public venues such as hotels and restaurants remained in place. The ban was originally issued by the mayor in February 2008 because officials felt that Valentine's Day was a Western tradition not compatible with Indonesian culture.

The civil registration system discriminates against persons who do not belong to one of the six recognized religious groups. Animists, Baha'i, and members of other small minority religious groups found it difficult to register births or marriages, notwithstanding the June 2007 regulation pertaining to marriage and civil administration, which allowed Aliran Kepercayaan marriages to be officially recognized. According to the Trimulya Foundation, an NGO that advocates for rights of Aliran Kepercayaan followers, adherents were sometimes unable to register marriages.

Men and women of different religions also continued to face obstacles to marrying and officially registering their marriages. Such couples had difficulty finding a religious official willing to perform the ceremony, which is required before registering a marriage. As a result, some persons converted in order to marry. Others traveled overseas, where they wed and then registered the marriage at an Indonesian embassy. Despite being among the officially recognized religious groups, Hindus stated that they frequently had to travel long distances to have their marriages registered, because in many rural areas the local government could not or would not perform the registration.

In practice couples prevented from registering their marriage or the birth of a child sometimes converted to one of the recognized religions or misrepresented them as belonging to one of the six. Those who chose not to register their marriages or births risked future difficulties, such as an inability to obtain birth certificates for children. Birth certificates are required for school enrollment, scholarships, and government employment.

Human rights groups continued to receive sporadic reports of local civil registry officials who rejected applications for identity cards (KTPs) submitted by members of unrecognized or minority religious groups. Some applicants found it easier to register with a religion other than their own and were issued KTPs that inaccurately reflected their religion. For example, some animists received KTPs that listed their religion as Islam. Many Sikhs were registered as Hindu on their KTPs and marriage certificates. Similarly, many Jews registered as Christians. Some citizens without a KTP had difficulty finding work. Several NGOs and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the Government to delete the religion category from the KTPs, but no progress was made.

Ahmadiyya followers forced from their homes in West Lombok by a mob in 2006 and living in the Transito Camp in Mataram continued to face difficulty obtaining KTPs due to the absence of a clear home address while displaced in the camp. As a result, The Ahmadiyya sometimes could not get free health services from hospitals as local officials refused to issue notification letters regarding their poor condition. The Ahmadiyya believed that they could obtain KTPs and resolve the issue if they could return to their home village.

In June 2008 in the Solok district of West Sumatra, local officials refused to perform marriage ceremonies for members of the Ahmadiyya sect. However, with the assistance of the local village head, individuals from the Solok district were able to marry in a different district and have not faced problems since their return.

Since the Government promulgated the Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship in 2006, implementation and defense of rights conferred under the decree have not always been enforced at the local level. During the reporting period, some Christian and Hindu groups pointed to sporadic acts of discrimination in which local authorities refused to authorize the building of churches and temples even though the groups managed to collect the necessary signatures.

In the regency of Langkat, North Sumatra, local authorities delayed Catholic leaders from building a church, despite the leaders having met the legal requirements to do so. The issue was ultimately solved through mediation with the FKUB. While local FKUBs are designed to serve as interfaith forums, they were often dominated by the majority religious group, which could oppose or stall provision of licenses to minority groups. In several cases in West Java, small churches faced difficulties obtaining licenses, frequently due to opposition in the FKUB.

During the reporting period, the Hindu Association reported that it has been permitted to build a temple in Tangerang, West Java. Initially there was opposition from the community despite the association having obtained the required signatures. However, due to lack of funding, the temple has not yet been built.

In 2007 the local government cancelled the permit for the construction of a Hindu temple in Pura Penataran Agung Rinjani, Bayan District, West Lombok. The officials cancelled the permit because the temple administrator was building a new and larger temple instead of renovating the existing one as requested in the permit. The construction was stopped when it reached 25 percent of completion. During the reporting period, construction was still suspended and no new permit request was submitted.

In January 2008 hundreds of protesters from the majority Muslim Sasak community attacked a Hindu temple in Pura Sangkareang, Keru, West Lombok, causing minor damage and halting renovations. Although the police made some arrests, the protesters were released shortly thereafter. Citing differing interpretations on building permits, some local officials believed the temple administrators required a permit and agreement from the local community prior to beginning renovation work. Temple administrators assumed that renovations, unlike construction, could proceed without approval from municipal authorities and local residents. Temple authorities have since applied for the appropriate permits and at the end of the reporting period their application was being reviewed by the national-level Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Religion. Currently, the temple is being used for religious services.

In Aceh, efforts to educate the public about, and enforce, Shari'a law continued, albeit at a much lower level of intensity than in years past. Not all local governments in Aceh have dedicated Shari'a police, and some have disbanded them. All districts have Shari'a offices, although local commitments to implement Shari'a vary by community. During Ramadan several districts, including Banda

Aceh, issued regulations ordering shopkeepers to close their businesses for midday prayers, and for restaurants to remain closed all day. Not all businesses and restaurants complied with these regulations. Throughout the reporting period, the Shari'a office and religious police worked jointly with the civil police to investigate and prosecute violations. At times the Shari'a police publicly lectured persons caught wearing improper Islamic dress in public or dating without an escort, but in these cases police generally did not arrest or charge them with crimes. Unlike previous reporting periods, there were no reports of any roadblocks to confirm whether passersby were wearing Islamic attire.

During the reporting period in Padang, West Sumatra, the mayor instructed all Muslim students to wear Islamic dress on Fridays and encouraged Muslim city officials to do so as well. Many, however, did not comply, and there was no penalty for noncompliance.

Some Christian groups state that Christian missionaries found it difficult to obtain or extend visas. Requirements for religious worker visas are more onerous than for other visa categories. In addition to requiring approval from each office of the Department of Religion from the local to national level, such extensions also require information on the number of followers of the religion in the community, and a statement by the applicant confirming that the applicant would work no more than two years in the country before being replaced by a local citizen. Foreign missionaries granted such visas worked relatively unimpeded. Many missionaries with a primary focus on development work successfully registered for social visas with the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education.

As in previous reporting periods, during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, many local governments ordered either the closure or a reduction in operating hours of various entertainment establishments. Several regional governments, including those of the cities of Palembang, Cilegon, Semarang and Makassar, issued a circular limiting the operating hours of night entertainment venues, cafes and restaurants during the month of Ramadan in 2008. The city administration of Tangerang also reportedly sealed ten cafes for not abiding by the local regulation.

Shortly before Ramadan 2008, Surabaya city government officials, social leaders, religious leaders, and businessmen signed a joint agreement not to operate nighttime entertainment during the fasting month. Similar regulations were applied in Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia. Regional governments, city administrations, and hardline groups sometimes employed force in enforcing these regulations, although in many cases police prevented vigilante groups from taking

action. Some members of minority religious groups, as well as some Muslims, believed these orders infringed on their rights.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government continued to explicitly and implicitly restrict the religious freedom of groups associated with forms of Islam viewed as outside the mainstream.

The Government tolerated discrimination and abuse toward the Ahmadiyya by remaining silent on the 2007 MUI fatwa containing guidelines condemning Islamic groups such as the Ahmadiyya, who profess belief in a prophet after Muhammad. The Government also remained silent on the 2005 MUI fatwa that explicitly banned the Ahmadiyya, as well as local government bans. Varying reports provided different numbers of mosques attacked or closed. However, according to national Ahmadiyya spokespersons, since the June 2008 decree, 21 Ahmadiyya mosques were forced to close around the country; 15 were closed in West Java alone. The June 2008 joint ministerial decree on the Ahmadiyya responded to calls to restrict the group's rights. For the most part, Ahmadiyya followers were allowed to continue worshiping, although some mosques were closed after the decree. However, because of the decree, Ahmadiyya followers were not free to proselytize or otherwise practice their faith publicly.

Authorities failed to halt vandalism on a number of Ahmadiyya facilities during the reporting period.

On June 2, 2009, a mosque belonging to Ahmadiyya members in Kebayoran Lama, South Jakarta, was deliberately set on fire by unidentified arsonists during dawn prayers. Witnesses told police that eight Ahmadiyya members were performing the dawn prayer on the second floor of the two-story building when two men sprayed the mosque with gasoline from a jerry can and lit the fire. There were no injuries in the incident and no arrests were made.

On April 19, 2009 a group of unidentified persons reportedly vandalized the Mahmud mosque in Talaga village. One hundred and fifty residents had sealed the same mosque in July 2008. Also, in July 2008, they sealed the Taher mosque in neighboring Sindankerta village, Cianjur, West Java.

On October 5, 2009, a group of people destroyed the Mubarak mosque in Mahato area, Tanjung Medan village, Pujud District, Rokan Hilir Regency, Riau Province, after the Eid al-Fitr celebration.

On August 27, 2008, hundreds of FPI members threatened the Ahmadiyya congregants of Al Mubarak mosque in Jagakarsa, South Jakarta, and demanded they cease all of their activities before the month of Ramadan.

Members of Ciputat Muslim Community Forum (FMCC) sealed the Baitul Qoyyum mosque belonging to Ahmadiyya on August 19. The FMCC believed that Ahmadiyya members had failed to abide by a joint ministerial decree released in June that banned the group from proselytizing. Police thwarted the residents' attempt to seal the mosque.

On August 8, 2008, local residents vandalized Baiturahman and Baitol Do'a mosques in Parakansalak, Sukabumi, West Java.

A group of hardliners sealed a small Ahmadiyya mosque in Talaga village and a mosque in Parabon village, Cianjur, West Java on August 1, 2008.

The Ahmadiyya community of 182 individuals living in camps as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in West Lombok since their homes and mosques were attacked by a mob in 2006 continued to face challenges during the reporting period. On April 14, 2009, the local government requested that the IDPs cancel plans to return to their homes in Gegerungan Village due to continued security concerns and pending compensation issues. The April request followed an earlier series of requests in March that the Ahmadiyya delay their plans to return. So far, four families have returned to Gegerungan Village. They are reportedly living and working there safely, although sometimes they still face low level intimidation from the local community.

During the reporting period 125 Ahmadiyya IDPs remained in the Transito Camp and 57 in Praya Camp. In mid-2008 one family from the Praya Camp returned home briefly, only to return to the camp shortly thereafter due to threats of violence. Sources within the Ministry of Religion reported a lower number of 150 IDPs living in the camps, of which 80 had been repatriated back to their homes.

In 2007 the local government reduced the rice subsidy and stopped subsidizing the electricity supply for the IDP camp. At the end of the reporting period, IDPs in the shelter receive two tons of rice subsidies every month. The local government also

reduced the water supply to the camp in 2008. Camp conditions remained difficult, with cramped living space and limited access to water. Although children have been able to attend local schools since 2006, they faced harassment. Ahmadiyyas who lived in the camps sometimes faced difficulties obtaining an ID card due to the absence of a clear address. However, those who lived in rented houses or took shelter in their family's houses did not have these problems. Ahmadiyya who lived in the camp also found it difficult to participate in the free health service program for the poor because they were not able to obtain a letter from local authorities verifying their economic status.

In February 2009 the provincial government in West Nusa Tenggara established a "Coordination Team" consisting of 17 members (religious leaders and academicians) to examine Ahmadiyya teaching and to discuss alternative solutions for the Ahmadiyya. The team offered two options: to relocate the Ahmadiyya into a heterogeneous area in Pemanang district in West Lombok, or to disperse them throughout city-owned land. Ahmadiyya representatives said that these two options were not acceptable and too complicated. Most city-owned land is in disputed areas and located in open green space.

During the reporting period, the Government arrested and charged individuals with heresy, blasphemy, and insulting Islam.

In June 2009 the Kupang District Police in East Nusa Tenggara arrested the leader of the Sion City of Allah sect and 12 of his followers for blasphemy. The sect was led by Nimbrot Lasbuan, a self-proclaimed prophet. The sect, whose teaching was based on the book of Jeremiah, banned its followers from joining church masses on Sunday. It also rejected the Holy Communion and wedding ceremonies conducted by the Timor Evangelical Church (GMIT) and forbade its female followers from wearing underwear while attending prayers.

On June 2, 2009, the Central Jakarta District Court found Lia Eden, the leader of the Jamaah Alamulla Group, guilty of blasphemy and incitement of hatred among religious adherents for proselytizing and delivering her messages to government institutions, including the Presidential Palace. Lia Eden was sentenced to two years and six months in prison. Eden's follower, Wahyu Wibisono was sentenced to two years in prison for writing Eden's religious concept. Eden and 23 of her followers had been arrested in December 2008 on charges of blasphemy. This was the second time that Eden had been tried for blasphemy. She was arrested for the same crime in 2006, sentenced to two years in prison, and released in October 2007 after serving 16 months. In November 2007 the Supreme Court sentenced

Abdul Rahman, Eden's son, who claimed to be the reincarnation of Prophet Muhammad, to three years in prison.

On May 2, 2008, the Padang District Court sentenced two local al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah sect activists, Dedi Priadi and Gerry Lufthi Yudistira, to three years in prison for blasphemy.

On April 23, 2008, the South Jakarta District Court sentenced al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah leader Ahmad Moshaddeq to four years in prison for blasphemy. The Court said Moshaddeq, who had claimed to be a prophet, was guilty of violating an article of the Criminal Code on hostility, misuse, and defamation against religion.

On April 5, 2008, police in Central Sulawesi shot and killed Madi, a fugitive sect leader involved in a 2005 clash that left five dead, including three police officers, when he forcefully resisted arrest. The 2005 clash broke out when police attempted to detain Madi for questioning regarding charges that Madi's teachings had created tension in society.

In November, 2007, Sidoarjo police arrested al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah's East Java leader Ari Cahyono. On the same day, 21 of the group's followers asked for protection by the East Java Police. The police allegedly declined and instead required them to provide a letter stating they would not spread their teachings to others. Those 21 persons repented in front of the East Java Police Chief and declared that they returned to Islam.

In October 2007 hundreds of persons raided the houses of three al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah followers in Gresik, East Java. Police subsequently detained the al-Qiyadah members on suspicion of blasphemy. The raid followed the Gresik Chapter of the MUI's issuance of an edict on October 6, 2007 stating that al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah is heretical, since it does not accept Muhammad as the last prophet or require prayer five times a day. By the end of October 2007, East Java Police arrested eight al-Qiyadah members on suspicion of blasphemy charges. They were released and the case was closed after they repented and agreed to return to Islam.

In September 2007 the Malang District Court sentenced 41 persons to five years in prison for blasphemy relating to dissemination of a "prayer training" video produced by the College Student Service Organization in Batu, East Java. Among other concerns, the video, distributed in early 2007, allegedly depicted 30

Christians being instructed by their leader to put Qur'ans on the floor. In August 2008 the 41 inmates received reprieves during the Indonesian Day Celebration.

In 2006 the Banyuwangi, East Java, regional legislature voted to oust Banyuwangi's Regent, Ratna Ani Lestari, from office. Those in favor of the ouster accused Ratna, a Muslim by birth, of blaspheming Islam by practicing a different religion from the one stated on her identity card. Ratna's supporters stated that she was the target of a religiously motivated smear campaign. Ratna stayed in office throughout the reporting period, because the regional legislature failed to submit a petition for her dismissal to the Supreme Court. During the reporting period, protests against her administration focused not on her religious background but her policies. Protest against her administration continued during the reporting period due to her policies and her alleged involvement in a corruption case.

According to confirmed reports, extremist groups used violence and intimidation to close at least nine churches during the reporting period. Groups also delayed and in some cases blocked petitions for churches to complete renovations. Small churches in West Java were under the most pressure, including in areas of Bandung, Tangerang, and Bekasi. At least six of the nine churches known to have closed did so due to pressure from local officials, while the remaining three churches closed due to pressure from the local community. While often present, police rarely acted to prevent forced church closings and in previous reporting periods had sometimes assisted in the closure.

During the reporting period, the Shari'a court in Aceh reported a total of 36 canings, all of which were for gambling. Unlike in other Southeast Asian countries, canings in Aceh are not administered to bare skin. Persons subject to caning in Aceh are fully clothed – sometimes with several layers of clothes. There are also regulations effectively limiting the amount of force which may be applied during a caning. Acehnese canings do not break the skin.

Despite police presence, municipal public order officers ransacked food stalls and coffee shops that operated during daylight hours during Ramadan in Pekanbaru, Riau. The city administration in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, also raided and arrested food stall vendors. These detained vendors were reportedly fined \$55 (500,000 rupiah) each or they faced three months' detention.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to return to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

There were no abuses by terrorist organizations during the reporting period. The Government made progress on prosecutions of individuals for acts of interreligious violence under the antiterrorism law and related charges for incidents in Central Sulawesi and Ambon between 2004 and 2006.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On October 30, 2008, the leader of the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), Rizieq Shihab, and the leader of the Islam Troop Command (KLI), Munarman, were sentenced to 18 months in prison, including time served, for their roles in leading attacks on members of the National Alliance for Religious Freedom (AKKBB) on June 1, 2008. The AKKBB was holding a rally in support of religious freedom, pluralism, and tolerance at the National Monument (Monas) square. FPI and KLI members believed the rally was intended as a show of support for the Ahmadiyya. FPI and KLI attacked protesters, including women and children, with sticks and stones, leaving an estimated 70 persons injured. After serving nine months of their 18 month sentence, both Rizieq Shihab and Munarman were released in July 2009 based on good behavior.

Representatives of the Confucian community confirmed their ability to practice their religion as well as obtain marriage certificates and identity cards with Confucianism listed as their religion. On September 1, 2008, the National Education Ministry issued two regulations legalizing the incorporation of the Confucian teachings into school curricula. Also during the reporting period, the Government granted a plot of land at the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah theme park to establish a Confucian temple. Confucianism was recognized as an official religion by the Government in 2006.

Local government officials in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) demonstrated a willingness to acknowledge the marriages of Ahmadiyya followers. Officials from the NTB Department of Religion went to the Ahmadiyya Transito Camp to marry Ahmadiyya couples, and to record and issue marriage certificates. Unlike previous years, it was difficult for the Ahmadiyya followers to marry as there were no local officials willing to either perform or register the marriage.

Despite new incidents of violence during the reporting period, leaders of both the Muslim and Christian communities and the Maluku provincial government continued to demonstrate their commitment to easing religious tension and to rebuild the community.

The Maluku Governor, Pattimura Military Commander, Maluku Police Chief, MUI chairman, and the head of the Maluku Synod visited Masohi for a dialog with social leaders, religious leaders, and youth leaders following a riot in Masohi in December 2008. The riot started after an elementary teacher allegedly made a comment insulting Islam. Reverend John Ruhlessin, the chairman of the Maluku Synod, announced that if the blasphemy allegation is true, he apologized on behalf of all Christians in Maluku.

During the reporting period, the Maluku Police Chief visited mosques and churches to promote community reconciliation among Muslim and Christian communities. Several government projects to replace damaged churches, mosques, and homes continued during the reporting period. The local government implemented economic recovery and conflict rehabilitation programs using a \$300 million (2.3 trillion rupiah) presidential allocation. The Maluku government took steps to strengthen coordination with civil society around social problems arising from local conflict and terrorist violence during the reporting period.

As in the previous reporting period, there were no major incidents of violence in Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi. Police cracked down on and arrested several suspects accused of terrorism and other violent crimes related to interreligious strife in Central Sulawesi during previous reporting periods. Local police in Central Sulawesi protected local churches and prayer houses during religious services. Local residents expressed optimism that the cycle of violence has slowed.

Citizens and religious leaders in Central Sulawesi continued to promote peace and religious harmony in the province. On April 7, 2009, thousands of people from different religions conducted mass prayer in front of Governor's office in Palu and committed to promote peace in Central Sulawesi.

During the reporting period, the Government successfully tried and convicted 13 suspects of terrorism, including individuals on the U.S. Department of State's terrorist watch list. Four of those tried and convicted on terrorism charges were affiliated with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The remainder of those convicted had started their own

terrorist cell, affiliated with JI only through the group's leader, in Palembang, South Sumatra.

On April 28, 2009, Singaporean Muhammad Hasan, a.k.a. Fajar Taslim, was convicted of terrorism and sentenced to 18 years in prison. Taslim received training in Afghanistan and had a close relationship with Singaporean JI leader Mas Selamat Kastari and the late bomb-maker Azahari. Taslim had incited the rest of the Palembang group to plan terrorist activities. In the same trial, Ali Mashudi, a.k.a. Zuber, and Wahyudi, a.k.a. Yudi, were sentenced to 10 and 12 years respectively for their roles in the Palembang group's terrorist activities.

On April 21, 2009, Abdurahman Taib and Ki Agus Muhammad Toni were sentenced to 12 years in prison for the killing of Christian teacher Dago Simamora in Palembang in 2007 and planning a number of terror attacks. Both Taib and Toni are members of the Palembang terrorist cell. In a separate trial, Anis Sugandi and Sukarso Abdillah were found guilty of harboring the other members of the Palembang group. Sugandi and Abdillah were sentenced to five and four years, respectively.

On April 7, 2009, three members of the Palembang terrorist cell were convicted of terrorism. Sugiarto, alias Sugicheng, alias Raja; Agustiawarman, alias Abu Taskid; and Heri Purwanto, alias Abu Hurairoh, were each sentenced to 12 years in jail for violating the antiterrorism law. They were found guilty of assembling a bomb and planning an attack on a bar in Western Sumatra.

On February 9, 2009, three JI terrorists, Parmin, alias Yaser Abdul Baar, Agus Purwanto, and Abdurrahim bin Thotib, alias Abu Husna, were convicted in the Central Jakarta District Court. Husna, the head of education for JI, was sentenced to nine years in prison. Purwanto and Parmin were each sentenced to eight years in prison for aiding and abetting JI operatives.

Trials were still in process for ten suspected terrorists who were arrested on July 1, 2008 in Palembang, South Sumatra for allegedly plotting an attack on a bar frequented by non-Muslims in a resort town on the island of Sumatra. The men, linked through their membership in the local Forum Against Apostasy or FAKTA group, allegedly called off the attack after realizing that Muslims might be killed. Members of the Palembang cell were loosely affiliated to JI through Muhammad Husan, aka Fajar Taslim, a former JI operative. The group was accused of killing an Indonesian Christian teacher in 2007 and attempting to kill a Catholic priest in

2005. When the group was brought to trial, they were separated based on the severity of their crimes into four cases, which were being tried concurrently.

Police reportedly negotiated with hardline groups in some areas, resulting in less tense situations during Ramadan. Despite these efforts, however, in several cases they failed to prevent closures and attacks. Police arrested several members of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) in many instances and in various places across the country that planned vigilante "raiding" of entertainment establishments during Ramadan. This represented an improvement from previous years when police did not do so.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were numerous reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Controversy over the Ahmadiyya continued throughout the reporting period. Hardline groups renewed attacks on the minority group.

Hardline religious groups demanded the Government act quickly to disband the Ahmadiyya and threatened to do so independently if the Government failed to act. Various rallies took place throughout the country both for and against a ban. Civil rights activists, members of the Presidential Advisory Council, and some leaders from Muhammadiyah and Nadhlatul Ulama spoke out claiming such a ban would be unconstitutional and contrary to the principles of Islam. Groups such as FUI, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, and FPI threatened senior NU clerics in Cirebon West Java who opposed banning Ahmadiyya. According to media reports and Ahmadiyya sources, after the June 2008 decree, hardline groups in some areas vandalized or closed 20 Ahmadiyya mosques. Women's groups reported continued discrimination against Ahmadiyya women and children whose schools were forced to close.

In August 2008 fifty FPI members rallied in front of East Java DPRD, protesting Ahmadiyya. Eighteen FPI representatives received by East Java DPRD demanded the President issue a Presidential Decree and that the East Java Parliament issue a local regulation (Perda) banning Ahmadiyya teaching because the teaching is in violation of and insulting to Islam.

In addition to the Ahmadiyya, there were also incidents involving Christian groups.

According to press reports, a Catholic politician was threatened and his house stoned by individuals claiming that he should convert to Islam if he wanted to assume his elected seat in the district legislature. The victim later reported that this was the only incident and that the police, other political parties, and local government were very supportive. The victim also believed the incident was triggered by disappointment over another candidate's loss and not religious bias.

According to the Indonesian Communion of Churches and the Wahid Institute, local government officials and local communities forced the closing of at least nine licensed and unlicensed churches across the country during the reporting period. Many of the targeted churches operated in private homes and storefronts, and some churches moved their services to rented spaces in public shopping malls to avoid threats from hardline groups.

In August 2008 the Pentecostal Church in Indonesia at Pondok Rangun, East Jakarta, was forced to stop services by local residents who vandalized the church. The protesters demanded the church close because it did not have a permit. Police were quickly at the scene to prevent further damage but did not make any arrests. Afraid to resume, the church stopped holding services.

In August 2008 dozens of people demanded that the Tangerang regional government and the Christian community of Pamulang cancel plans to build the Barnabas Church, citing the relatively small Christian population. However, during the reporting period, the regional government issued a building permit and church construction was nearly complete.

In July 2008 the Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology (SETIA) was attacked by residents in Kampung Pulo, West Jakarta, after a student was accused of stealing from a resident's home. During the attack more than 20 students were injured. In response to the violence, local authorities immediately relocated more than 1,200 SETIA students who were boarding at the school. The school is currently operating out of three separate locations, creating challenges for holding integrated classes. Conditions in some of the locations are poor and unhygienic. The students have not been allowed to return to their campus to reoccupy the school or to collect reading materials, desks, beds and other belongings, despite the property legally belonging to the school since 1987. Local police in Kampung Pulo say this is because they cannot protect the students or school administrators from further violence. The school is currently looking for a new campus.

In July 2008 municipal police, under an order from the subdistrict head, demolished the Indonesian Evangelical Prophet Church (Gekindo) in Jatimulya, Tambun Selatan, Bekasi, West Java. The church had not been operating for the past two years pending license from the local government.

Several houses of worship, religious schools, and homes of Muslim groups regarded as unorthodox were attacked, vandalized, forced to shut down, or prevented from being established by militant groups and mobs throughout the country. In several cases police temporarily detained members of "deviant groups" who were victims of attacks, ostensibly to ensure their safety, but did not arrest attackers.

In April, 2008, in response to *Fitna*, a film critical of the Qur'an and produced by Dutch opposition parliamentarian Geert Wilders, 50 students from the Indonesian Muslim Student Association attacked the Medan office of the Dutch honorary consul in protest. At the end of the reporting period, eight of the students, who had been sentenced to eight months in prison, were released for time served.

Muslims sometimes reported difficulties in establishing mosques in Muslim-minority areas of Papua, North Sulawesi, and elsewhere.

On January 14, 2009, dozens of people destroyed a small family-owned mosque under construction in Sumberduren village of Blitar Regency (East Java). The perpetrators argued that the mosque did not have a permit. Prior to the January incident, the Blitar Regent issued a letter asking the mosque's builders to stop construction due to unclear land ownership status.

Hardline religious groups used pressure, intimidation, or violence against those whose messages they found offensive. Militants purporting to uphold public morality sometimes attacked cafes and nightclubs they considered venues for prostitution or that had not made payments to extremist groups, although the number of such incidents decreased compared to previous years.

Unforced conversions between religious groups occurred, as allowed by law, but they remained a source of controversy. Some Muslims accused Christian missionaries of using food and microcredit programs to lure poor Muslims to convert. Some converts felt compelled not to publicize their conversions for family and social reasons.

During the reporting period, the West Sumatra MUI continued to urge Muslims to refrain from celebrating Valentine's Day because it undermined the country's culture and values.

Fighting between villages in Maluku continued during the reporting period. On April 15, 2009 residents and religious leaders from the conflict-impacted village of Kailolo met with the local police chief to hand over their homemade weapons, bombs, and ammunition as an effort to foster social peace.

On February 26, 2009, the Masohi District Court of Maluku began trials for three suspects charged with blasphemy, inciting riot and house burning during a December 2008 mob incident. The incident involved 300 persons who burned down two churches and dozens of homes belonging to both Christians and Muslims. The mob alleged that a Christian teacher at a local primary school made insulting remarks to her students about Islam and Muhammad. The three suspects, including the coordinator of the Central Maluku Islamic Communication Forum, were charged with provoking the attacks and circulating inflammatory pamphlets.

On January 7, 2009, 100 Muslims demonstrated in front of a synagogue in Surabaya protesting the Israeli attacks in Gaza. Some protesters carried signs with anti-Semitic references. Police forced back the protesters, who tried to enter the synagogue. There were no injuries or damage.

Sabili, a widely read Islamic magazine, continued to publish articles with anti-Semitic statements and themes, and it alleged the existence of conspiratorial "Zionist" activities in the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, consulate general in Surabaya, and consulate in Medan regularly engaged Government officials on specific religious freedom issues, and also encouraged officials from other missions to discuss the subject with the Government. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders, officials of Islamic social organizations, and human rights advocates to clarify U.S. policy in support of religious freedom, discuss religious tolerance, and promote respect for religious freedom. Embassy staff also met with members of

minority religious groups, whose houses of worship were forcefully closed, to discuss religious freedom and pluralism.

Embassy and consulate outreach to the public emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in a democratic and diverse society. The Embassy and consulates also promoted pluralism and tolerance through exchanges and civil society programs.

During the reporting period, two short-term programs sponsored by the U.S. Government that incorporated discussions of religious freedom, pluralism, and tolerance in the United States and Indonesia brought a total of 63 Indonesians to the United States. The programs allowed participants to engage in dialogue with U.S. counterparts about the integral roles of religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and multiculturalism in a democratic society, to promote the concept of religious freedom in the country. One exchange program offered 45 Indonesian Islamic boarding school (pesantren) educators the opportunity to shadow teachers in 12 schools throughout the United States and give presentations to American students about Indonesia. Participants examined U.S. democracy as well as religious freedom, civic involvement, and religious education in schools, and related those issues to U.S. and Indonesian society. Furthering the program, upon their return to Indonesia the pesantren educators continued dialogue via on-line blogs and e-mail communication connecting both students and educators.

Another exchange program brought 15 American high school teachers together with 17 Indonesian teachers to build a curriculum unit that promotes interfaith dialogue, cultural understanding, and democratic values to build tolerance among various communities. The Americans visited a wide variety of local leaders, teachers, and students, representing the country's major religious groups, in Yogyakarta, Makassar, Balikpapan, and Jakarta. The Indonesian teachers traveled to the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute to work alongside the Americans in creating this unit of curriculum to be used in American and Indonesian schools.

The Embassy and consulates reached a broad population during the reporting period through the production of media programs that provided in-depth coverage of issues, including religious freedom, from a U.S. perspective. These included several television co-op productions, which aired on major free-to-air Indonesian television stations.

The Embassy and consulates also supported campus seminar programs aimed at strengthening supporters of pluralism on Islamic campuses, and reinforcing an understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, pluralism, and gender equity. Five American religious scholars visited Indonesia on an exchange program and held public discussions on several campuses in Jakarta, Lombok, and Malang in cooperation with state Islamic universities and public universities. More than 1,500 students from a wide range of backgrounds participated in the discussions.

In October 2008 USAID signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Commission on Human Rights. Under this MOU, which will run through July 2010, the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) agreed to provide training and technical assistance to selected provincial and district government officials to improve their understanding and implementation of national law protecting freedom of religion.

The U.S. State Department funded a summer institute for university faculty and education practitioners on religious pluralism, democracy, and culture in the United States.

IRAN

The Constitution states that Islam is the official state religion, and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'afari (Twelver) Shi'ism. The Constitution provides that "other Islamic denominations are to be accorded full respect," while the country's pre-Islamic religious groups--Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews--are recognized as "protected" religious minorities. However, Article 4 of the Constitution states that all laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. In practice, the Government severely restricted freedom of religion.

During the reporting period, respect for religious freedom in the country continued to deteriorate. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community. Reports of government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Baha'i religious groups reported arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, expulsions from universities, and confiscation of property. Government-controlled broadcast and print media intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly the Baha'is, during the reporting period. All non-Shi'a religious minorities suffered varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

Although the Constitution gives Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians the status of "protected" religious minorities, in practice non-Shi'a Muslims faced substantial societal discrimination, and government actions continued to support elements of society who created a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

The U.S. Government makes clear its strong objections to the Government's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities through public statements, support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, as well as diplomatic initiatives. Every year since 1999, the U.S. Secretary of State has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for its particularly egregious violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 631,000 square miles and a population of 70 million. The population is 98 percent Muslim--89 percent is Shi'a and 9 percent Sunni (mostly Turkmen and Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest respectively). There are no official statistics available on the size of the Sufi Muslim population; however, some reports estimate between two and five million persons practice Sufism in the country. Non-Muslims are estimated to account for 2 percent of the population.

Recent unofficial estimates from religious organizations claim that Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Sabean-Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians constitute 2 percent of the population. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Baha'is, who number 300,000 to 350,000. Unofficial estimates of the Jewish community's size vary from 20,000 to 25,000.

According to U.N. figures, 300,000 Christians live in the country, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians. Unofficial estimates for the Assyrian Christian population range between 10,000 and 20,000. There are also Protestant denominations, including evangelical religious groups. Christian groups outside the country estimate the size of the Protestant Christian community to be less than 10,000, although many Protestant Christians reportedly practice in secret. Sabean-Mandaeans number 5,000 to 10,000 persons. The Government regards the Sabean-Mandaeans as Christians, and they are included among the three recognized religious minorities; however, Sabean-Mandaeans do not consider themselves Christians. The Government estimates there are 30,000 to 35,000 Zoroastrians, a primarily ethnic Persian minority; however, Zoroastrian groups claim to have 60,000 adherents. There are indications that members of all religious minorities are emigrating at a high rate, although it is unclear if the reasons for emigration are religious or related to overall poor economic conditions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'afari (Twelver) Shi'ism." All laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law). The Constitution provides Sunni Muslims a degree of religious freedom; however, the Government severely restricts overall religious freedom. The Constitution states that "within the limits of the law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their religious beliefs.

However, members of these recognized minority religious groups reported government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, heads a tricameral structure of government (legislative, executive, and judicial branches). The Supreme Leader is not directly elected, but chosen by a group of 86 Islamic scholars (the Assembly of Experts), who are directly elected. All acts of the Majles (Parliament) must be reviewed for strict conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution, and all candidates for any elected office must be vetted by the unelected Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics, appointed by the Supreme Leader, and six Muslim jurists (legal scholars), nominated by the head of the judiciary and approved by the Majles.

The Government observes 14 religious holidays as national holidays, including Eid-e-Ghadir, Tassoua, Ashura, Arbaeen, Death of the Prophet Muhammad, Martyrdom of Imam Reza, Birthday of Imam Ali, Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, Birthday of Imam Mahdi, Eid-e-Fitr, Martyrdom of Imam Ali, Martyrdom of Imam Jafar Sadegh, Eid-e-Ghorban, and the Islamic New Year.

The Government does not respect the right of Muslim citizens to change or renounce their religious faith. A child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim by the Government.

Non-Muslims may not engage in public religious expression, persuasion, and conversion among Muslims, and there are restrictions on published religious material. In February 2008, a revision to the Penal Code was drafted for approval by the legislature whereby apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, would be punishable by death. This revision passed in the Majles in September 2008 and was reportedly implemented on a 1-year trial basis. On June 23, 2009, the Legal and Judicial Committee of the Majles recommended removing the revision from the Penal Code, but no further information was available at the end of the reporting period. Previously, death sentences for apostasy have been issued under judicial interpretations of Shari'a. However, there were no reported cases of the death penalty being applied for apostasy during the reporting period.

Proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims is illegal. Evangelical church leaders are subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they will not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services. Members of religious

minorities, excluding Sunni Muslims, are prevented from serving in the judiciary and security services and from becoming public school principals.

Applicants for public sector employment are screened for their adherence to and knowledge of Islam, although members of religious minorities could serve in lower ranks of government employment, with the exception of Baha'is. However, government workers who do not observe Islam's principles and rules are subject to penalties.

The Constitution states that the army must be Islamic and must recruit individuals who are committed to the objectives of the Islamic Revolution. In practice, however, no religious minorities are exempt from military service. The law forbids non-Muslims from holding officer positions over Muslims in the armed forces. Members of religious minorities with a college education can serve as officers during their mandatory military service but cannot be career military officers.

By law, religious minorities are not allowed to be elected to a representative body or to hold senior government or military positions, with the exception that 5 of a total 290 seats in the Majles are reserved for religious minorities. Three of these seats are reserved for members of Christian religious groups, including two seats for Armenian Christians and one for Assyrian Christians. There is also one seat to represent Jews and one to represent Zoroastrians. While Sunnis do not have reserved seats in the Majles, they are allowed to serve in the body. Sunni Majles deputies tend to be elected from among the larger Sunni communities. Members of religious minorities are allowed to vote; however, no member of a religious minority, including Sunni Muslims, is eligible to be president.

The legal system discriminates against religious minorities. Article 297 of the amended 1991 Islamic Punishments Act authorizes collection of equal "blood money" (diyeh) as restitution to families for the death of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Prior to a 2004 change, the law gave a lesser monetary amount as "blood money" for non-Muslims. Baha'is and Sabean-Mandaeans, in addition to women, are excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill. According to law, Baha'i blood is considered mobah, meaning it can be spilled with impunity.

Adherents of religious groups not recognized by the Constitution, such as the Baha'is, do not have freedom to practice their beliefs. The Government prohibits Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith. Baha'is are barred from all leadership positions in the Government and military.

The Government considers Baha'is to be apostates and defines the Baha'i Faith as a political "sect." The Ministry of Justice states that Baha'is are permitted to enroll in schools only if they do not identify themselves as such, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools with a strong and imposing religious ideology. There were reports that Baha'i children in public schools faced attempts to convert them to Islam.

After a brief policy change in 2007 allowing Baha'i students to enroll in universities, the Government reverted to its previous practice of requiring Baha'i students to identify themselves as a religion other than Baha'i in order to register for the entrance examination. This action precluded Baha'i enrollment in state-run universities, since a tenet of the Baha'i Faith is not to deny one's faith. The Ministry of Justice states that Baha'is must be excluded or expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, if their religious affiliation becomes known. University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic, Christian, or Jewish theology, but there was no test for the Baha'i theology.

Baha'is are banned from the social pension system. In addition, Baha'is are regularly denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization and the right to inherit property. Baha'i marriages and divorces are not officially recognized, although the Government allows a civil attestation of marriage to serve as a marriage certificate.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain self-financed cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations. However, the Government prohibited the Baha'i community from official assembly and from maintaining administrative institutions by closing any such institutions.

The Government propagated a legal interpretation of Islam that effectively deprived women of many rights granted to men. Gender segregation was enforced generally throughout the country without regard to religious affiliation. Women of all religious groups were expected to adhere to Islamic dress in public. Although enforcement of rules for conservative Islamic dress eased at times, the Government periodically cracked down on "un-Islamic dress." The Government's 12-point contract model for marriage and divorce limits the rights accorded to women by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, respect for religious freedom in the country continued to deteriorate. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community. Reports of government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Baha'i religious groups reported arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, expulsions from universities, and confiscation of property. Government-controlled broadcast and print media intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly the Baha'is, during the reporting period. All non-Shi'a religious minorities suffered varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (Ershad) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) monitored religious activity closely. Members of recognized religious minorities were not required to register with the Government; however, their communal, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, were monitored closely. Registration of Baha'is was a police function during the reporting period. The Government also required evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations.

The Government generally allowed recognized religious minority groups to conduct religious education for their adherents in separate schools, although it restricted this right considerably in some cases. The Ministry of Education, which imposed certain curriculum requirements, supervised these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools was not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. The Ministry of Education must approve all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. Recognized religious minorities could provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages, but such texts required approval by the authorities. This approval requirement sometimes imposed significant translation expenses on minority communities. However, Assyrian Christians reported that their community was permitted to write its own textbooks, which, following government authorization, were then printed at government expense and distributed to the Assyrian community.

On May 25, 2009, the EU Presidency issued a statement expressing its deep concern over the violations of religious freedom in the country. On December 18,

2008, for the sixth consecutive year, the U.N. General Assembly passed another resolution condemning the human rights situation in the country and decrying the Government's harsh treatment of religious minorities.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is severely undermined their ability to freely practice their faith and function as a community. Baha'i groups reported that the Government often denied applications for new or renewed business and trade licenses to Baha'is. The Government repeatedly pressured Baha'is to accept relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their religious beliefs. The Government prevented many Baha'is from leaving the country.

Baha'is could not teach or practice their religious beliefs or maintain links with coreligionists abroad. Baha'is were often officially charged with "espionage on behalf of Zionism," in part due to the fact that the Baha'i world headquarters is located in Israel. These charges were more acute when Baha'is were caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

During the reporting period, Baha'is continued to face an increasing number of public attacks, including a series of negative and defamatory articles in *Kayhan*, a government-affiliated newspaper whose managing editor was appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i. The national daily newspaper *Etemad* and several provincial newspapers also published defamatory articles against Baha'is. The articles often accused Baha'i and Sunni Salafist groups of working together to undermine national security and to commit espionage on behalf of foreign governments. State-run media reported that on May 19, 2009 Majles member Hojjatoleislam Mohammad-Ebrahim Nekounam told a session of Parliament that Baha'ism was established to "infiltrate Iran" and "create divisions" among Muslims and that members of the Baha'i community throughout the country were working toward those goals. In February 2009 the semiofficial Fars News Agency reported that the Prosecutor General sent a letter to the Minister of Intelligence warning that Baha'is had "extensive and established ties with the Zionist regime and their members try to collect information, carry out infiltration activities, and destroy people's belief in Islam." During the reporting period, articles in the state-run media alleged that Baha'ism encourages its followers to commit incest with close family members.

Public and private universities continued to deny admittance to or expel Baha'i students. Although in 2007 the Government briefly allowed Baha'i matriculation into universities, in 2008 the Government reverted to its earlier policy of denying

university admittance to Baha'i students; this policy remained in effect throughout the reporting period.

There were reports that the Government compiled a list of Baha'is and their trades and employment using information from the Association of Chambers of Commerce and related organizations, which are nominally independent bodies that are nonetheless heavily influenced by the Government.

Many Sunnis claimed that the Government discriminated against them. However, it is difficult to distinguish whether the cause of discrimination was religious or ethnic, since most Sunnis are also members of ethnic minorities. Sunnis cited the absence of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, despite the presence of more than one million adherents there, as a prominent example. Sunni leaders reported bans on Sunni religious literature and teachings in public schools, even in predominantly Sunni areas. Human rights organizations reported that the Government demolished several Sunni mosques during the reporting period. Sunnis also noted the underrepresentation of Sunnis in government-appointed positions in the provinces where they form a majority, such as Kurdistan and Khuzestan Provinces, as well as their inability to obtain senior governmental positions.

Sunni Majles representatives asserted that government discrimination led to the lack of Sunni presence in the executive and judicial branches, especially in higher-ranking positions in embassies, universities, and other institutions, as well as anti-Sunni propaganda in the mass media, including books and other publications.

While the Government recognizes Judaism as an official religious minority, the Jewish community experienced official discrimination. The Government continued to sanction anti-Semitic propaganda involving official statements, media outlets, publications, and books. The Government's anti-Semitic rhetoric, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens of the country support Zionism and the state of Israel, continued to create a hostile atmosphere for Jews. The rhetorical attacks also further blurred the line between Zionism, Judaism, and Israel and contributed to increased concerns about the future security of the Jewish community.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued a virulent anti-Semitic campaign. During the reporting period, the President publicly stated in news conferences that the Zionists infiltrated the world and must be stopped and destroyed, together with Israel.

President Ahmadinejad continued to regularly question the existence and the scope of the Holocaust, which created a more hostile environment for the Jewish community. At a January 2009 speech at Sharif University in Tehran, the President alleged that the "Holocaust discourse" was created to expand "Zionist command over centers of power, wealth, and the world media."

The Government promoted and condoned anti-Semitism in state media; however, with some exceptions, there was little government restriction of, or interference with, Jewish religious practice. The Government reportedly allowed Hebrew instruction but limited the distribution of Hebrew texts, particularly nonreligious texts, making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government required that in conformity with the schedule of other schools, Jewish schools must remain open on Saturdays, which violates Jewish law.

Jewish citizens were free to travel out of the country but were subject to the general restriction against travel by the country's citizens to Israel. This restriction, however, was not enforced.

The Sabean-Mandaean religious community reportedly faced harassment and repression by authorities similar to that faced by other religious minorities. The Government often denied members of the Sabean-Mandaean community access to higher education.

Sufis within the country, Sufi organizations outside the country, as well as numerous human rights organizations, remained extremely concerned about growing government repression of Sufi communities and religious practices, including increased harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services. Government restrictions on Sufi groups and houses of worship (husseiniya) became more pronounced in recent reporting periods. There were numerous reports of Shi'a clerics and prayer leaders denouncing Sufism and the activities of Sufis in the country in both sermons and public statements.

The Government carefully monitored the statements and views of senior Shi'a religious leaders. The Special Clerical Courts, established to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics, and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, are not provided for in the Constitution and operate outside the judiciary. In particular, critics alleged that the clerical courts are used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial political ideas and for participating in nonreligious activities, including journalism.

Non-Shi'a religious leaders reported abuse and widespread restrictions on their ability to practice their faith. They also reported bans on Sunni teachings in public schools and Sunni religious literature. Residents of provinces with large Sunni populations, including Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Sistan-va-Baluchestan, reported discrimination and lack of resources, but it is difficult to determine if this discrimination was based on religion or ethnicity, or both.

Laws based on religious affiliation continued to be used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists have been imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic." According to domestic press reports, on June 9, 2009, singer Mohsen Namju was sentenced to a 5-year prison term for "insulting Islamic sanctities, reciting verses of the Holy Qur'an ridiculously, and insulting the world Muslims' sacred book."

On October 8, 2008, authorities in Qom arrested online journalist and cleric Mojtaba Lotfi for posting on an Internet site a sermon by Ayatollah Montazaeri, a well-known opponent of the system of clerical rule. The sermon criticized President Ahmadinejad for saying Iran is the freest country in the world. On November 29, 2008, a special court for the clergy sentenced Lotfi to 4 years in prison and 5 years of banishment from Qom.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and other leading human rights organizations, more than 200 Baha'is have been killed since 1979, and 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead.

Baha'i groups outside the country reported that government authorities increased their harassment and intimidation of the members of the Baha'i community during the reporting period.

The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs. The Government arbitrarily arrested Baha'is and charged them with violating Islamic Penal Code Articles 500 and 698, relating to activities against the state and spreading falsehoods, respectively. Often the charges were not dropped upon release, and those with charges pending against them reportedly feared re-arrest at any time. Most were released only after paying large fines or posting high

bails. For some, bail was in the form of deeds of property; others gained their release in exchange for personal guarantees or work licenses.

At the end of June 2009, at least 20 to 30 Baha'is remained in detention because of their religious beliefs. The Government never formally charged many of the others but released them only after they posted bail.

In mid-March, intelligence agents in Sari reportedly arrested Shirin Foroughian Samimi, a Baha'i. In 2008 authorities closed down her husband's store, arrested him, and charged him with endangering national security. He was released after 9 days.

On March 9, 2009, security forces reportedly arrested Baha'i Pooya Tebyanian in his home in Semnan.

On January 18, 2009, security forces in Ghaemshahr in Mazandaran Province detained four Baha'is after raiding their homes. Previously, on January 10, authorities in Ghaemshahr arrested another Baha'i, Pegah Sanaie; she was released on bail on January 17.

On January 16, 2009, several Baha'i women were reportedly arrested for performing missionary work on Kish Island.

On January 15, 2009, security forces in Tehran arrested five Baha'is and took them to Evin Prison. At least one Baha'i, a woman from Shiraz named Negin Rezaei, was being held in section 209 of Evin Prison at the end of the reporting period.

On January 9, 2009, three Baha'i community leaders--Adel Fanaian, Abbas Nourani, and Zaher Eskandarian--were arrested in their homes in Semnan Province.

On November 22, 2008, authorities arrested two Baha'is in Sari, Mazandaran Province, after searching their homes and confiscating Baha'i materials.

On November 18, 2008, a Baha'i was arrested in Ghaemshahr.

Two officials of the Baha'i community in Isfahan and one other member of the Baha'i community, arrested in May 2008, reportedly on charges of burying their dead at a particular site that had been used for the past 15 years, remained in Isfahan Prison at the end of the reporting period.

The seven leaders of the Baha'i community--Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Behrouz Tavakkoli, Saeid Rezaie, Vahid Tizfahm, and Mahvash Sabet--arrested between March and May 2008 remained in detention. In February 2009 the Judiciary spokesman announced that the seven were accused of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic." In May 2009 state-run media reported the Government also charged them with "spreading corruption on earth," a crime punishable by death. None had been allowed access to their attorney, Abdolfattah Soltani. On June 16, 2009, security agents arrested Soltani without a warrant and took him to an unknown location. At the end of the reporting period, the Baha'i leaders were awaiting trial by a revolutionary court.

Mohammad Ismael Forouzan, a Baha'i arrested in March 2008 on unknown charges, was informed that his appeal had been denied, and he began serving a 1-year prison sentence.

Aziz Pourhamzeh, Kamran Aghdasi, and Fathollah Khatbjavan, detained in January 2008, reportedly remained in prison at the end of the reporting period.

Pouriya Habibi and Simin Mokhtari, arrested in January 2008 and detained on charges of teaching the Baha'i Faith, reportedly remained in Evin Prison at the end of the reporting period.

The Government continued to hold many Baha'i properties, including cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, and administrative centers, that were seized following the 1979 Revolution. Many of the properties have been destroyed. Baha'is were generally prevented from burying and honoring their dead in accordance with their religious tradition.

On January 19, 2009, the Baha'i cemetery of Ghaemshahr was attacked for the fourth time in 8 months and almost completely destroyed. According to witnesses, municipality officials razed the cemetery with a bulldozer at night.

On January 12, 2009, government workers entered a Tehran cemetery and demolished an entire section known as the burial ground of "infidels," an area where the Government interred people executed in the early years of the Islamic Revolution. Among the graves destroyed were those of Baha'is who had been members of national or local Baha'i governing councils in 1980, 1981, or 1984,

years when the government rounded up the members of these councils and executed them.

The property rights of Baha'is were generally disregarded, and they suffered frequent government harassment and persecution. The Government raided Baha'i homes and businesses and confiscated large numbers of private and commercial properties, as well as religious materials, belonging to Baha'is. The Government reportedly seized numerous Baha'i homes and handed them over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. The Government also seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held, despite the owners' having proper ownership documents. The Baha'i community reported that the Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property and its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment was eroding the economic base of the community and threatening its survival.

On March 1, 2009, the University of Semnan expelled Minoos Shahriari, an economics student, on the grounds that she was Baha'i.

According to domestic press reports, the University of Kerman expelled nine Baha'i students on January 14, 2009.

On December 1, 2008, there were reports of protests by Muslim students at Goldshat College in Kelardasht in Mazandaran Province over the expulsion of a Baha'i classmate.

On November 2, 2008, two Baha'i students were expelled from Shaheed Beheshti University on the basis of their religion.

There were reports of authorities forcing Baha'i businesses to close, placing restrictions on their businesses, and asking managers of private companies to dismiss their Baha'i employees.

Sufi Muslims likewise faced an increasing repression campaign, including defamatory attacks in newspapers and in sermons by Shi'a clerics.

On March 14, 2009, a representative of the Gonabadi dervishes, a Sufi mystical sect, reported that authorities were holding 41 dervishes in Evin Prison for practicing their religion.

On February 18, 2009, authorities razed the house of worship of Gonabadi dervishes at Takht-e Foulad, in Isfahan, with bulldozers. All Sufis present were arrested and had their mobile phones confiscated. Sufi books and publications were destroyed.

In January 2009 Jamshid Lak, a Sufi of the Gonabadi Dervish order, was flogged 74 times. He was charged in 2006 with "slander" against the Ministry of Intelligence after reportedly publicly complaining of the ill treatment he received at the hands of the Ministry.

In late December 2008, authorities arrested six members of the Gonabadi Dervishes on Kish Island. Their books, other materials, and computers were confiscated.

In November 2008 Amir Ali Mohammad Labaf, of the Nematollahi Gonabadi Sufi order, was sentenced to 74 lashes, 5 years in prison, and internal exile to the town of Babak for "spreading lies."

In October 2008 at least seven Sufi Muslims in Isfahan and five Sufis in Karaj were arrested because of their affiliation with the Nematollahi Gonabadi Sufi order.

Christians, particularly evangelicals, continued to be subject to harassment and close surveillance. During the reporting period, the Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing by closely monitoring the activities of evangelical Christians, discouraging Muslims from entering church premises, closing churches, and arresting Christian converts. Members of evangelical congregations were required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshipers were subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. The Government restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays, and church officials were ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members.

On May 21, 2009, security officials arrested five Christian converts in Karaj who had gathered in a home for Bible study and worship. The house where they were meeting was searched and several Bibles confiscated. The five were being held at an unknown location.

On May 14, 2009, authorities arrested Abdul Zahra Vashahi, father of a prominent Christian Iranian human rights activist in the United Kingdom, in Bandar Manshahr after warning him that he would be held accountable for his son's activities. He was released 6 days later.

On May 14, 2009, a court in Ouroumieh reportedly denied pension benefits to Fatemeh Pauki, a retired Christian school teacher from West Azerbaijan Province. Pauki had been repeatedly detained and forced by authorities to promise to end her contact with Christian groups. Her husband, who had been detained and harassed by authorities over the years as well, was mysteriously killed in 2005.

In late March 2009, according to domestic human rights groups, a revolutionary court closed the Pentecostal church of Shahr Ara in Tehran, which belongs to Assyrian Christians. According to reports, the stated reason for the closure was the "illegal activities" of converting Muslims to Christianity and "accepting converts" to worship as members of the congregation.

On March 10, 2009, a Shiraz court sentenced three Christian converts--Seyed Allaedin Hussein, Homayoon Shokouhi, and Seyed Amir Hussein Bob-Annari--to 8-month prison terms with 5 years' probation. The judge warned the men to discontinue their Christian activities or risk being tried as apostates.

On March 5, 2009, authorities arrested two members of the Christian community, Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad. The women were being held in Evin Prison and reportedly were not receiving adequate medical care.

On January 21, 2009, authorities arrested three Christians--Hamik Khachikian (an Armenian Christian), Jamal Ghalishorani, and Nadereh Jamali (both Christian converts)--in Tehran. Their homes were searched and their computers and books were confiscated. According to a February 9 report, Khachikian was released without charges on January 28, while Ghalishorani and Nadereh were later released on bail.

On October 22, 2008, Ramtin Soodmand, a Christian, was released on bail. Soodmand had been arrested on August 21 on charges of spreading antigovernment propaganda.

On July 17, 2008, plain clothes security officers raided the home of Isfahan Iranian Christians Abbas Amiri and his wife, Sakineh Rahnama, during a meeting. Both Amiri and Rahnama died of injuries suffered during the raid. Authorities denied

permission for the local Christian community to hold a memorial service for the couple.

On June 3, 2008, a Christian convert couple, Makan Arya and Tin Rad, reportedly were seized from their home in Tehran. Authorities accused Arya of "activities against national security" and Rad of "activities against the holy religion of Islam." Officials threatened to charge the two with apostasy. After being forced to sign statements swearing that they had not converted from Islam, Arya and Rad were released on bail. The two were forced to leave their church, and Arya was pressured to display pictures of Muslim leaders in his storefront window to ward off continued attacks on his shop.

According to a September 30, 2008, report, Christian converts Mahmoud Matin-Azad and Arash Basirat were released after a tribunal ruled that the charges of apostasy brought against the men were invalid. The two were arrested in Shiraz in May 2008.

Christian convert Mojtaba Hussein, arrested in May 2008, remained in detention. His family did not know where he was being held, and requests for a visit were denied.

There were no developments in the 2007 killings of three senior Sunni clerics.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Government officials reportedly offered Baha'is relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their religious affiliation, and if incarcerated, recanting their religious affiliation as a precondition for releasing them.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although the Constitution gives Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians the status of "protected" religious minorities, in practice non-Shi'a Muslims faced substantial societal discrimination, and government actions continued to support elements of society who create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities. President Ahmadinejad's agenda stressed the importance of Islam in enhancing

"national solidarity" and mandated that government-controlled media emphasize Islamic culture in order to "cause subcultures to adapt themselves to public culture."

After President Ahmadinejad took office in August 2005, conservative media intensified a campaign against non-Muslim religious minorities, and political and religious leaders issued a continual stream of inflammatory statements. The campaigns against non-Muslims contributed to a significantly worse situation for non-Muslim society throughout the reporting period.

Sunni Muslims and Christians encountered societal and religious discrimination and harassment at the local, provincial, and national levels.

Baha'is faced government-sanctioned discrimination in the workplace. Baha'i graveyards in Abadeh and other cities were desecrated, and the Government did not seek to identify or punish the perpetrators.

Baha'i groups outside the country reported vandalism of Baha'i cemeteries, the desecration of a body exhumed from a Baha'i grave in Abadeh, and attacks against a Baha'i cemetery in Najafabad.

On October 23, 2008, individuals using a bulldozer desecrated a Baha'i cemetery in Darzikola.

The car of Soheil Naeimi, a Baha'i, was burned in Rafsanjan in Kerman Province on July 25, 2008, after his family and ten other Baha'i families received threatening letters from a group calling itself the "Anti-Baha'ism Movement of the Youth of Rafsanjan."

On July 18, 2008, a Baha'i family's home was burned to the ground in Kerman, according to the representative of the Baha'i International Community to the U.N.

A building owned by a Baha'i couple was burned down in Tangriz in Fars Province on June 10, 2008. The family reportedly filed a formal criminal complaint, but authorities declined to pursue the case.

There were reported problems for Baha'is in different trades around the country. Baha'is experienced an escalation of personal harassment, including receiving threatening notes, compact discs, text messages, and tracts. There were reported cases of Baha'i children being harassed in school and subjected to Islamic

indoctrination. Baha'i girls were especially targeted by students and educators, with the intention of creating tension between parents and children.

There was serious concern from several religious and human rights groups about the resurgence of the once banned Hojjiyeh Society, a secretive religious-economic group that was founded in 1953 to rid the country of the Baha'i Faith in order to hasten the return of the 12th Imam (the Mahdi). Although not a government organization, it was believed that many members of the administration were Hojjiyeh members and used their offices to advance the society's goals. However, it was unknown what role, if any, the group played in the arrests of numerous Baha'is during the reporting period. Many Baha'i human rights groups and news agencies described the goals of the Hojjiyeh Society as the eradication of the Baha'is, not just the Baha'i Faith. The group's anti-Baha'i orientation reportedly widened to encompass anti-Sunni and anti-Sufi activities as well.

Many Jews sought to limit their contact with or support for the state of Israel out of fear of reprisal. Anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations included the denunciation of Jews, as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only "Israel" and "Zionism," adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

There were reports during the reporting period that members of the Sabean-Mandaean community experienced societal discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Iran was first designated a CPC in 1999 and was most recently re-designated on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary designated the existing ongoing restrictions on United States security assistance in accordance with section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act. The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran, and thus it does not raise directly with the Government the restrictions that the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the Government commits against adherents of minority religious groups.

The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses. The U.S. Government calls on other countries that have bilateral relations with Iran to use those ties to press the Government on religious freedom and human rights matters.

On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities in the country. The U.S. Government has publicly condemned the treatment of the Baha'is in U.N. resolutions, including one that passed in the General Assembly in 2008. The U.S. Government encourages other governments to make similar statements.

IRAQ

The country is a constitutional democracy with a republican, federal, pluralistic system of government, consisting of 18 provinces or "governorates." Although the Constitution recognizes Islam as the official religion and states that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam, it also states that no law may be enacted that contradicts principles of democracy or the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in the Constitution. Moreover, it guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Although the Government generally endorsed these rights, violence conducted by terrorists, extremists, and criminal gangs restricted the free exercise of religion and posed a significant threat to the country's vulnerable religious minorities throughout the reporting period. Radical Islamic elements from outside the Government exerted tremendous pressure on individuals and groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islamic precepts. Sectarian violence, including attacks on religious leaders and religious places of worship, hampered the ability to practice religion freely. The Government's growing will and capacity to challenge its militant opponents resulted in a decrease in the overall level of violence as the Government became increasingly successful in restoring security, in a generally nonsectarian manner, throughout the country.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Since 2003 the Government generally has not engaged in the persecution of any religious group, and has called for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities. This commitment was publicly reinforced by the Prime Minister's deployment of additional police brigades to the city of Mosul following a series of killings targeting Christians in the city in October 2008. In addition, the Prime Minister, along with other high-ranking government officials and political party leaders, made numerous public statements in support of the country's religious minority communities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior U.S. administration and embassy officials called for unity in the face of sectarian violence and pressed for greater inclusion of religious minorities in the political process. Individuals from minority groups hold senior positions in the national Parliament and central Government, as well as in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), but

generally, minorities are proportionally underrepresented in the Government, particularly at the provincial and local levels.

Section I. Religious Demography

Due to increased violence, internal migration, and lack of governmental capacity, religious demography statistics varied. Numbers are often estimates from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than census data or other official sources. The Government passed a census law, which will allow them to conduct a nationwide census in the future.

The country has an area of 168,754 square miles and a population of about 28.9 million. According to statistics provided by the Government, 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Shi'a Muslims--predominantly Arabs, but also Turkmen, Faili (Shi'a) Kurds, and other groups--constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Arab and Kurdish Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent of the population; of these, 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 percent are Sunni Arabs, and the remaining 1 to 2 percent are Sunni Turkmen. Approximately 3 percent of the population comprises Christians, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Baha'is, Shabaks, Kaka'is (sometimes referred to as Ahl-e Haqq), and a very small number of Jews. Shi'a, although predominantly located in the south and east, are also a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the west, center, and the north of the country.

Reported estimates from Christian leaders of the Christian population in 2003 ranged from 800,000 to 1.4 million. Current population estimates by Christian leaders range from 500,000 to 600,000. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Chaldeans (an eastern rite of the Catholic Church), nearly one-fifth are Assyrians (Church of the East), and the remainder are Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenians (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), Anglicans, and other Protestants. Most Assyrian Christians are in the north, and most Syriac Christians are split between Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Ninewa Province. Christian leaders estimate that as much as 50 percent of the country's Christian population lives in Baghdad, and 30 to 40 percent lives in the north, with the largest Christian communities located in and around Mosul, Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk. The Archbishop of the Armenian Orthodox Diocese reported that 15,000 to 16,000 Armenian Christians remained in the country, primarily in the cities of Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, and Mosul. Evangelical Christians reportedly number between 5,000 and 6,000. They can be found in the northern part of the country, as well as in Baghdad, with a very small number residing in Basrah.

Yezidi leaders reported that most of the country's 500,000 to 600,000 Yezidis reside in the north, with 15 percent in Dohuk Province and the rest in Ninewa Province. Shabak leaders stated there are 200,000 to 500,000 Shabaks, who reside mainly in the north, near Mosul. Estimates of the size of the Sabean-Mandaean community vary widely; according to Sabean-Mandaean leaders, 3,500 to 7,000 remained in the country, down from an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 in 2003. The Baha'i leadership reported that their members number fewer than 2,000 and are spread throughout the country in small groups. A sizable portion of the Jewish community, which once had a significant presence in the country, left in the years immediately following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Eight Jews remain in Baghdad, and none are known to live in other parts of the country.

As of June 2009, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that approximately 1.5 million Iraqis had fled and remain outside the country. In May 2009 UNHCR reported that 57 percent of all registered Iraqi refugees (in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt) were Sunni, 21 percent were Shi'a, 4 percent were non-specified Muslim, 14 percent were Christian, 3 percent were Sabean-Mandaean, and fewer than 1 percent were Yezidi. In June 2009 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that there are an estimated 2.8 million internally displaced persons in the country. After the al-Askariya mosque bombings in February 2006, 1.6 million persons were displaced. An estimated 59 percent of the internally displaced are Shi'a Muslims, 35 percent are Sunni Muslims, 5 percent are Christians, and fewer than 1 percent are Yezidis.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally endorsed this right. However, other legal provisions are subject to interpretations that limit religious freedom.

Article 10 of the Constitution establishes the Government's commitment to assuring and maintaining the sanctity of holy shrines and religious sites and to guaranteeing the free practice of rituals there. Article 43 of the Constitution states that followers of all religious groups and sects are free in the practice of religious rites and in the management of religious endowments, their affairs, and their religious institutions. The second clause of Article 43 explicitly guarantees

freedom of worship and protection of places of worship, although legislation to implement the clause remains outstanding.

It is the Government's policy to protect the rights of all religious groups to gather and worship freely; however, in practice, ongoing violence and instability impeded citizens' ability to exercise this right in some parts of the country.

Article 2 of the Constitution, which recognizes Islam as the country's official religion, mandates that Islam be considered a source of legislation and states that no law can be enacted that contradicts the faith's universally agreed-upon tenets. It also stipulates that no law can be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy or basic freedoms, including the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice. Article 14 of the Constitution establishes that citizens are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief, opinion, or economic or social status.

Article 41, which requires implementing legislation, provides that citizens are free in their commitments to their personal status according to their religious groups, sects, beliefs, or choices. Until such implementing legislation is passed, the 1959 Personal Status Law (Law 188) remains in force. Article 42 of the Constitution provides that each person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. However, a 1972 law still in effect makes conversion of minor children to Islam automatic if one of the parents converts to Islam. The Minister of Human Rights raised this issue with the Higher Judicial Council seeking to have the law overturned, but the Council determined that the law remains valid.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. To register, a group must have a minimum of 500 adherents in the country.

The Government maintains three waqfs, or religious endowments: the Sunni, the Shi'a, and the Christian and Other Religions Endowments. The endowments were formed when the Ministry for Religious Affairs was dissolved under the Coalition Provisional Authority in August 2003. The endowments, which operate under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, receive government funding to maintain and protect religious facilities.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In most areas of the country, the curriculum of both primary and secondary public schools includes three class periods per week of Islamic education, including study of the Qur'an, as

a requirement for graduation. Non-Muslim students throughout the country are not required to participate in Islamic studies; however, some non-Muslim students reported that they felt pressure to do so. Private schools such as Al-A'araf Elementary School and the Al-Massara School for Girls, which is run by the Eastern Orthodox Church, are now operating in the country. To operate legally, private schools must obtain a license from the Director General of Private and Public Schools and pay annual fees.

The Kurdistan Region Ministry of Education funds Aramaic-language public schools (elementary and high school) where students are taught in Aramaic, Arabic, and Kurdish. The majority of these (more than 30 elementary schools and eight secondary schools) are in Dohuk and supply appears to meet demand. These schools have operated since the late 1980s and are overseen by a special division within the Ministry staffed by Christians.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), through the Kurdistan Region Ministry of the Endowment, pays the salaries of imams and funds the construction and maintenance of mosques. This funding is available for Christian religious establishments, but many churches prefer to be self-funded.

Most Islamic holy days are also national holidays, including Ashura, Arbai'n, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad). Nawruz, a national holiday, is celebrated as a religious holiday by Baha'is. Christmas was declared a national holiday during the reporting period. Christians reported that although Easter is not a national holiday, government policy recognizes their right to observe it.

Article 1 of the Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 mandates that criminal penalties can be imposed only by civil law. Under the country's civil law, there is no penalty for conversion and the Penal Code does not impose the Shari'a penalty, despite the Shari'a punishment for conversion from Islam to another religion. The Law of Civil Affairs No. 65 of 1972 explicitly allows non-Muslims to convert to Islam.

At the end of the reporting period, national identity cards continued to note the holder's religion, which has been used as a basis for discrimination; however, passports did not note religion.

Law No. 105 of 1970 prohibits the Baha'i Faith, and a 2001 resolution prohibits the Wahhabi branch of Islam. Although provisions on freedom of religion in the new

Constitution may supersede these laws, no court challenges have been brought to have them invalidated, and no legislation has been proposed to repeal them.

In April 2007 the Ministry of Interior's Nationality and Passport Section canceled Regulation 358 of 1975, which prohibited the issuance of a nationality identity card to those claiming the Baha'i Faith. In May 2007 a small number of Baha'is were issued identity cards. The Nationality and Passport Section's legal advisor stopped issuance of the cards thereafter, claiming Baha'is had been registered as Muslims since 1975 and citing a government regulation preventing the conversion of "Muslims" to another faith. Without this official citizenship card, Baha'is experience difficulty registering their children for school and applying for passports. Despite the cancellation of the regulation, Baha'is whose identity records were changed to "Muslim" after Regulation 358 was instituted in 1975 still could not change their identity cards to indicate their Baha'i faith, and their children were not recognized as Baha'is.

A March 2006 citizenship law specifically precludes Jews from regaining citizenship if it is ever withdrawn.

Article 41 of the Constitution states that "Iraqis are free in their commitment to their personal status according to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices, and this shall be regulated by law." Although the Personal Status Law of 1959 calls for incorporation of Shari'a into the law in the absence of legislative text on a matter, Article 2(1) of the Constitution expressly exempts from its application individuals covered by "special law." Such special law includes British Proclamation No. 6 of 1917 and the Personal Status Law of Foreigners, No. 38, of 1931. Proclamation No. 6 provides that the civil courts consult the religious authority of the non-Muslim parties for its opinion under the applicable religious law and apply this opinion in court. The Personal Status Law of Foreigners also requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters. Despite this exception, there are instances in which this law, based on Shari'a principles, applies to non-Muslims, thereby overriding rules particular to an individual's religion. For instance, the law forbids the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man; also, in the distribution of inheritance, a female receives one-half of what a male receives. These provisions could be considered inconsistent with Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law without discrimination based on gender or religion. Other provisions of the Constitution, notably Article 2(1)(A), prohibit laws from contradicting the "established provisions of Islam," creating potentially conflicting constitutional standards. No court has yet ruled on this issue.

Article 92 of the Constitution provides that the Federal Supreme Court shall be made up of a number of judges, experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and legal scholars. At the end of the reporting period, no legislation had been enacted to regulate the number, method of selection, and work of the Court, leaving unsettled the question of whether Islamic jurisprudence experts would serve as consultants and advisors to the judges or as members of the Court.

The Government provides significant support for the Hajj by organizing travel routes and assisting pilgrims with obtaining immunization documents for entry into Saudi Arabia. The Government also provides funding to Sunni and Shi'a waqfs, which accept Hajj applications from the public and submit them to the Supreme Council for the Hajj. The Council, attached to the Prime Minister's Office, organizes a lottery process that selects pilgrims for official Hajj visas.

The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government continued to provide political representation and support to minority communities during the reporting period. The Iraqi Council of Ministers includes two Christian ministers (Human Rights, Industry and Minerals), and two Christian ministers (Finance, Civil Society) are in the Kurdistan Region Council of Ministers. The Kurdistan Region Council of Ministers also includes two Ministers without Portfolio who are prominent Yezidis.

Saddam-era campaigns against Kurds in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the destruction of a number of Christian villages in Dohuk Province; most residents relocated to Baghdad. Under the supervision of the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Finance, a number of these towns have been re-inhabited, housing has been rebuilt, and the original inhabitants have received small stipends to move back.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practices generally did not interfere with the free practice of religion; however, violence in some parts of the country had a negative impact on the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith, although to a lesser extent in the Kurdistan region. Sectarian misappropriation of official authority within the security apparatus, which could impede the right of citizens to worship freely, continued to be a significant concern.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on religious beliefs or interpretations of religious doctrine.

The education department in the province of Salah ad-Din instructed schools to ban female teachers from wearing trousers. According to the government statement, the "[education department] sees that long and conservative clothing is much better than trousers." The statement instructed schools to report teachers who violated the order so the "severest disciplinary measures" could be taken.

During the reporting period, there were some schools and other public places where non-Muslim minorities and secular Arabs felt obliged to adhere to certain conservative Islamic practices. This occurred less frequently than in previous reporting periods.

Although a few individuals from minority communities held senior positions in the Government, there were reports of religiously based employment discrimination in which ministries hired and showed favoritism toward individuals who shared the minister's religious persuasion.

Several evangelical churches complained that they had been unable to obtain official registration from the Government and that registration conditions were too onerous. In order to register, a church must have 500 members and receive approval from the Council of Iraqi Christian Church Leaders, a quasi-governmental group consisting of representatives from each of the 14 officially recognized churches.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

It is contrary to stated government policy for officials to engage in or tolerate abuses of an individual's right to religious freedom. The Government focused its resources and attention during the reporting period primarily on defeating the ongoing insurgency and on reconstruction efforts, and had a limited capacity to address matters relating to abuses of freedom of religion. Limitations in security force capabilities and in the country's rule of law infrastructure made it difficult for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or the justice system to investigate and prosecute criminal activity, including alleged sectarian-based crimes, although some investigations were carried out.

There were allegations that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) engaged in discriminatory behavior against religious minorities. Christians and Yezidis living north of Mosul claimed that the KRG confiscated their property without compensation and that it began building settlements on their land. Assyrian Christians alleged that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-dominated judiciary

in Ninewa routinely discriminated against non-Muslims and failed to enforce judgments in their favor. There were reports that Yezidis faced restrictions when entering the KRG and had to obtain KRG approval to find jobs in areas within Ninewa Province administered by the KRG or under the security protection of the Peshmerga.

There were also allegations that the KRG exhibited favoritism toward the Christian religious establishment, and it was alleged that on February 17, 2008, KRG authorities arrested and held incommunicado for four days an Assyrian blogger, Johnny Khoshaba Al-Rikany, based on articles he had posted attacking corruption in the church.

Yezidi and Shabak political leaders alleged that Kurdish Peshmerga forces regularly committed abuses against and harassed their communities in Ninewa Province. Districts that are within the security control of the Peshmerga include Sinjar, Sheikhan, Ba'asheqa (sub-district of Mosul), and Bartalla (sub-district of Hamdaniya). Minority leaders alleged that Kurdish forces were intimidating minority communities to identify themselves as Kurds and support their inclusion in the KRG. Yezidi political representatives also reported that because of their religious affiliation, they were not allowed to pass through security checkpoints in areas controlled by Kurdish Peshmerga as they traveled from Baghdad to their communities in northern Iraq.

The KRG denied allegations that it was behind violent incidents directed at Christians and other minorities. Moreover, despite such allegations, many non-Muslims reside in northern Iraq and the KRG area, and there were reports that some sought refuge there from other parts of the country where pressures to conform publicly to narrow interpretations of Islamic tenets were greater. In February 2009 the IOM estimated that there were 19,100 internally displaced families in the Ninewa Plain and that 43,595 internally displaced families were located in the Kurdistan region.

The Armenian Orthodox Church of Iraq worked with government officials to regain properties the former regime forced it to sell. Although the Church was paid fair market value for properties in Mosul, Basrah, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Dohuk, it had been forced to sell the properties under pressure. Previous efforts to regain properties did not succeed, but church officials stated that the government rulings in these property claim cases are being appealed.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States. However, Sabean-Mandaeans reported that Islamic extremists threatened, assaulted, kidnapped, and killed members of their religious group for refusing to convert to Islam. Christians living in Baghdad's Doura district and in the city of Mosul also reported that Islamic extremists threatened to kill them unless they converted, left, or paid a jizya (a tax on non-Muslims).

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Many individuals from various religious groups were targeted because of their religious identity or secular leanings. Acts committed against them included harassment, intimidation, kidnapping, and murder. The general lawlessness that permitted criminal gangs, terrorists, and insurgents to victimize citizens with impunity affected persons of all ethnicities and religious groups. The overall magnitude of sectarian violence declined during the reporting period. The overwhelming majority of the mass-casualty attacks targeted the Shi'a population.

Shi'a in Sunni-dominated neighborhoods, Sunnis in Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods, and religious minorities in both Sunni- and Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods reported receiving death threat letters demanding that they leave their homes, and in many cases individuals either complied or were killed. These incidents were fewer than in the prior reporting period.

Many attributed sectarian violence in the country to terrorists attempting to sow sectarian strife. The rate of sectarian displacement, which increased as a result of the upsurge in sectarian violence following the February 2006 bombing of the al-Askariya Shrine ("the Golden Mosque") in Samarra, remained low during the reporting period. By the end of the reporting period, available evidence suggested that more sectarian integration was taking place than additional sectarian displacement. The UNHCR estimated that 220,000 to 300,000 Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons returned to their homes in 2008. The majority of these returnees (89 percent) were internally displaced persons.

Even so, numerous incidents of sectarian violence occurred during the reporting period. Very few of the perpetrators of violence committed against Christians and

other religious minorities in the country have been punished; arrests following a murder or other crime are rare.

There were no data available on active participation in religious services or rituals; however, terrorist attacks rendered many mosques, churches, and other holy sites unusable. During most of the reporting period, many worshippers reportedly did not attend religious services or participate in religious events because of the threat of violence. Christian leaders inside and outside the country reported that members of their communities received threatening letters demanding that Christians leave or be killed. In October 2008, for example, a group calling itself the Ansar al-Islam Battalions sent a letter to leading Christian leaders in the country warning them that all Christians should leave the country immediately or face death.

During the reporting period, Sabean-Mandaean leaders reported that their community continued to be targeted. In addition to being forced to convert, they reported kidnappings, with victims held for ransom. In some cases, ransom was paid. However, among those cases, only some were released; others were killed or remained missing. Women were pressured to wear the hijab and to marry non-Sabean-Mandaean men. Sabean-Mandaeans also reported that their gold and jewelry stores were burglarized.

During the reporting period, Yezidi and Shabak leaders reported that their communities also continued to be targets of harassment and violence.

Violence against members of Iraqi religious minorities--other than cases of simple criminality for profit--was orchestrated by al-Qa'ida in Iraq or, in some cases, by Shi'a extremists.

On June 24, 2009, a bomb attached to a motorcycle exploded in a crowded market in the predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Sadr City in Baghdad, killing at least 76 persons and injuring 158.

On June 20, 2009, a suicide truck bomb exploded near the mosque of Al-Rasool Al-a'dham in the town of Taza, south of Kirkuk, killing at least 68 persons and injuring nearly 200.

On June 12, 2009, the leader of the Sunni political party Tawafuk, Harith al-Obaidi, was killed in the Al-Shawaf mosque in the neighborhood of Yarmouk in Baghdad. After the gunman shot al-Obaidi, he threw a grenade that killed four

others and injured 12. The following week, Iraqi security forces arrested a man they described as the "mastermind" behind the killing.

On June 10, 2009, a car bomb killed at least 28 persons and injured 70 at a market in the predominantly Shiite city of Nasriya in southern Iraq.

On May 20, 2009, a car bomb killed 34 persons and injured scores of others in the predominantly Shi'a neighborhood of Shula in Baghdad.

On May 15, 2009, a Christian missionary was kidnapped in Kirkuk and held for eight days before mediation by tribal chiefs and local imams led to his release.

On May 11, 2009, a car bomb targeting a police patrol detonated near the al-Adl mosque in the al-Asra neighborhood of Kirkuk, killing two persons and injuring eight.

On May 11, 2009, a Christian child kidnapped by terrorists on March 5, 2009, was found killed in Mosul. The abductors demanded a ransom but killed the child before the ransom was paid.

On May 10, 2009, a young Christian man was found killed in the al-Qadisiya district east of Kirkuk city. According to police sources, he was killed by the same terrorist organization responsible for the bombing of the Al-Rasool Al-a'adham mosque in Taza on June 20.

On May 9, 2009, an alcohol seller in the al-Shurta district of southeastern Baghdad was found killed after merchants in the area received anonymous warnings to close their shops.

On May 6, 2009, a truck bomb targeting a Shiite produce market in the Doura neighborhood of Baghdad exploded, killing 10 persons and wounding 37.

On April 29, 2009, three car bombs targeting predominantly Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad killed at least 17 persons. Two of the bombs exploded in the Muraidi market area of Sadr City. The third bomb targeted the Shiite neighborhood of Shurta Rabia in southwestern Baghdad. On the same day, two additional car bombs exploded in front of the Sunni Nida Allah mosque in the Shiite district of Huriya in northwestern Baghdad, killing two persons and injuring eight.

On April 26, 2009, in the city of Kirkuk, three Chaldean Christians were shot and killed in their homes and two others were injured. On April 29, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in Kirkuk received reports that eight suspected members of al-Qa'ida in Iraq had been arrested in connection with the attack. However, the suspects were later released due to lack of evidence, and no additional arrests were made.

On April 25, 2009, a Sabean-Mandaean goldsmith was killed during a kidnapping attempt in Baghdad. A media report quoted the goldsmith's friend as saying the victim had been threatened many times and ordered to pay large sums of money as a "tax" for being Sabean.

On April 24, 2009, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up as worshippers were entering Baghdad's most important Shiite shrine, the mosque of Imam Mousa al-Kadhim. This resulted in 66 deaths, among them 25 religious pilgrims from Iran; 127 were injured.

On April 23, 2009, a suicide bomber blew up a restaurant in Baqubah, the capital of Diyala Province, killing 48 persons, mostly religious pilgrims from Iran.

On April 22, 2009, a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a Sunni mosque in Dhuluiya, north of Baghdad, killing at least five persons and injuring 15.

On April 19, 2009 three Sabean-Mandaean goldsmiths were among seven jewelers killed in a coordinated daytime robbery in Baghdad. Three other Sabean-Mandaeans were severely injured. Four suspects in the killings were arrested.

On April 6, 2009, a bomb near the mosque of Imam Mousa al-Kadhim in Baghdad killed seven persons and injured 23.

On April 5, 2009, a group of gunmen shot and killed a Christian man in his generator repair workshop in Mosul.

On April 2, 2009, according to press reports, three Assyrian Christians were stabbed and killed in their homes in the Doura neighborhood of Baghdad. Although the motive is unknown, a local Christian leader indicated that the motivation for the killings was "theft."

On April 1, 2009, a Christian man was found dead in Kirkuk, with his throat slit.

On March 25 and 26, 2009, two Yezidi men were shot and killed, their bodies discovered in fields near the city of Mosul. Iraqi security forces reportedly believed that one of the deaths was the result of a tribal feud.

On February 16, 2009, unknown gunmen shot and killed a 15-year-old Christian boy and critically injured another in the al-Midan area of Mosul.

On February 16, 2009, eight Shiite pilgrims returning from the holy city of Karbala were killed in two separate roadside bombings in Baghdad, one on the edge of Sadr City and the other in the Shiite neighborhood of Al Obeidi.

On February 13, 2009, a suicide bomber blew herself up among Shiite pilgrims walking in an annual procession to the holy city of Karbala from Baghdad, killing 35 persons.

On February 12, 2009, a bomb placed inside a propane gas canister exploded in Karbala, killing eight persons and injuring 35. The attack came as tens of thousands of Shiite pilgrims were massing to commemorate Arbaeen, one of the holiest events for Shiites.

On February 8, 2009, a roadside bomb in northern Baghdad killed two Shiite pilgrims and injured 11 others who were on their way to Karbala for the commemoration of Arbaeen.

On January 16, 2009, a young Christian was found killed, with a close range gunshot wound to the head, in Mosul.

On January 16, 2009, a Shiite cleric and political candidate of the Dawa party was assassinated in the province of Babil after leaving a campaign event.

On January 4, 2009, an armed group broke into the home of an elderly Christian couple in the Doura neighborhood of Baghdad. The gang threatened the husband and then strangled and killed his wife.

On January 4, 2009, a suicide bomber blew herself up near the mosque of Imam Mousa al-Kadhim in Baghdad, among a crowd of Shiite pilgrims, killing 40 and injuring more than 70.

On December 31, 2008, a Christian was kidnapped and tortured in Mosul before being released four days later after a \$50,000 ransom was paid to the kidnappers.

On December 27, 2008, a Christian man was shot and killed by an Iraqi army soldier at a checkpoint near the Church of St. Behnam and St. Sara in the town of Baghdida. Police conducted an initial investigation, but no further details were known.

On December 27, 2008, there was a report that the body of a Christian girl was found in a river in the area of Nahla in northern Iraq. The report stated that a Kurdish man may have abducted the girl, but no arrest was made.

On December 27, 2008, a car bomb killed 24 persons, many of them Shiite pilgrims, and injured 46 others when it exploded on a road in Baghdad that leads to the mosque of Imam Mousa al-Kadhim.

On December 14, 2008, a group of armed men shot and killed seven members of a Yezidi family in their home in the town of Sinjar in Ninewa Province.

On December 9, 2008, a criminal gang robbed, tortured, and strangled a Christian clothing store owner in his home in Baghdad.

On December 7, 2008, according to press reports, two Yezidis were killed in a liquor store in Mosul.

On December 2, 2008, a suicide bomber targeting Coalition Forces blew himself up near the Church of St. Joseph in the city of Mosul, killing at least 15 persons, including a Christian father and son.

On November 29, 2008, a suicide bomber blew himself up inside the courtyard of the Shiite mosque Al Hussainiya in the town of Musayyib, located south of Baghdad. The explosion killed 12 persons and injured 19. The town was also the site of a suicide bombing using a gasoline tanker that killed 70 persons in 2005.

On November 13, 2008, a Christian was killed when a car bomb exploded in the al-Naaeriya area of New Baghdad.

On November 11, 2008, according to a media outlet, two Christian sisters were killed, their mother injured, and their home bombed in Mosul by armed gunmen. One was killed while she was waiting for a bus and the other after the gunmen stormed the family's home. The motive for the attack is unknown.

On October 14, 2008, a church in the northern city of Mosul was bombed. There were no casualties.

During a 10-day period in the beginning of October 2008, 14 Christians were killed in Mosul, prompting more than 2,000 families to flee their homes for villages in the Ninewa Plain north of the city. The attacks followed protests in which hundreds of Christians demonstrated for greater representation on the country's local provincial councils. Leaflets were distributed in predominantly Christian neighborhoods threatening families to convert to Islam, pay the "jizyah" tax, leave the city, or be killed. Gunmen then set up checkpoints in several parts of the city, stopping vehicles in search of residents who could be identified as Christians. Local security forces did little to stop the killings, but Prime Minister Maliki sent two additional brigades of police to reassert control of the city. During the last months of 2008, the majority of Christian families who had fled returned to Mosul. A government investigation into the killings had not been made public by the end of the reporting period.

On October 2, 2008, suicide bombers killed two dozen persons in attacks on two Shiite mosques as Iraqis were attending prayers for the first day of the Eid al-Fitr celebration. The attacks came in the Shiite neighborhood of Zafaraniya and the middle-class neighborhood of New Baghdad.

On September 14, 2008, Fouad Ali Hussein al-Douri, a Sunni mosque imam and a proponent of reconciliation in his mixed neighborhood of Baghdad, was killed.

On September 10, 2008, it was reported that a Christian man was shot and killed in the al-Bakr neighborhood of Mosul. The motives for the killing were unknown.

On September 8, 2008, it was reported that armed men killed three Sabeen-Mandaean family members, including a child, in their family store in Baghdad.

On September 2, 2008, according to press reports, two Christians were kidnapped and killed in Mosul despite ransom payments to the kidnappers.

On August 18, 2008, a suicide bomber killed 15 persons and injured 29 others in front of the Sunni Abu Hanifa mosque in Baghdad.

On August 16, 2008, a suicide bomber killed six persons and injured 10 in an attack near a bus pickup point in northeast Baghdad for Shiite pilgrims heading to

Karbala to celebrate the birthday of Muhammad al-Mahdi, one of the holiest days in the Shiite calendar.

On August 15, 2008, a pickup truck exploded near the central bus station in the largely Shiite town of Balad, killing nine pilgrims.

On August 14, 2008, a suicide bomber blew herself up in a tent filled with women on a religious pilgrimage in the city of Iskandariya, killing 18 persons and injuring scores of others.

On August 14, 2008, in a separate attack, a Shiite pilgrim was killed and seven others injured by a roadside bomb in downtown Baghdad.

On July 26, 2008, gunmen killed seven Shi'a pilgrims in the town of Madain who were traveling to the Shiite shrine in the mosque of Imam Mousa al-Kadhim in Baghdad's Kadhimiyah District.

On July 28, 2008, two suicide bombers and a third bomb killed 32 persons and injured 64 in Baghdad during a Shiite religious procession to the shrine of Imam Kadhim.

On July 13, 2008, gunmen killed a member of the Shabak Assembly near the village of Oman Qabchi. Shabak political representatives accused Kurdish Peshmerga forces of the attack.

On July 10, 2008, a Christian man was shot and killed in his car by gunmen in Mosul who stole all of his possessions.

On July 2, 2008, a group calling itself the Battalion of Just Punishment, Jihad Base in Mesopotamia, sent threatening letters to Assyrian churches in Mosul, demanding they not cooperate with Coalition Forces.

In a symbolically significant event, the Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, Paulus Faraj Rahho, was kidnapped on February 29, 2008, for failing to pay protection money or "jizya" to Islamic insurgents. The archbishop died while in captivity. Government security forces subsequently arrested one of the kidnappers, and he was sentenced to death.

Regardless of religious affiliation, women and girls were often threatened for refusing to wear the hijab, for dressing in Western-style clothing, or for failing to

adhere sufficiently to strict interpretations of conservative Islamic norms governing public behavior. Numerous women, including Christians, reported opting to wear the hijab for security purposes after being harassed for not doing so.

Shopkeepers were targeted for providing goods or services considered to be inconsistent with Islam, and sometimes were subjected to violence for failing to comply with warnings to stop such activity. Liquor store owners, primarily Christians and Yezidis, were especially targeted. On April 20, 2009, the Governor of Karbala, Amal al-Din al-Hir, stated that he would "take strong measures against liquor stores" because "they violate the sanctity of the city," although no official liquor stores were known to exist in the province. Some political figures complained that the Government was not licensing restaurants to sell alcohol in Baghdad. The Iraqi Parliament also debated the possibility of banning alcohol, but no formal legislation was introduced.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The "surge" by the Multinational Forces in Iraq, in coordination with Iraqi Security Force operations, reduced the overall level of violence in the country; however, significant effects were slow to trickle down to the country's minority communities. Despite the tenuous environment, the Government generally conducted security operations in a nonsectarian manner, removing the principal threat to religious freedom in the country and providing an opportunity for the Government to begin to improve overall conditions in this area.

During the reporting period, the Government took direct responsibility for protecting the population, leading to improvements in the overall security environment.

In October 2008 Prime Minister Maliki sent additional police brigades to Mosul to protect the city's Christian population against criminal, militia, and al-Qa'ida forces in those areas, launched an investigation into the attacks, and set up a National Security Council committee to assess the situation. Security improvements in Mosul allowed a majority of displaced Christians to return to their homes.

The security situation in the Doura neighborhood of Baghdad improved sufficiently to allow 325 Christian families who had been displaced by sectarian violence to return. Two churches were operating in the neighborhood--one Assyrian Orthodox and one Chaldean--along with a Chaldean seminary. Church leaders reported full attendance at services in these churches throughout the

reporting period. Christmas was declared a national holiday, and on December 20, 2008, the Ministry of Interior sponsored a public Christmas event in Baghdad.

Chaldean patriarch Cardinal Delly led Christmas Mass at the Virgin Mary convent church in Baghdad's Karada neighborhood with Ammar Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a prominent member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), in attendance.

The Government also enhanced security at churches throughout Iraq during Easter celebrations.

Sabean-Mandaean leaders stated that the security situation had improved during the reporting period to the point that the community in Baghdad was able to hold without incident a baptismal ceremony in March 2009 at the Tigris River with 400 members attending.

On November 3, 2008, the Council of Representatives passed an amendment to the Provincial Elections Law that reserved six seats for minority groups throughout the country--two in Baghdad (one each for Christians and Sabean-Mandaeans), three in Ninewa Province (one each for Christians, Yezidis, and Shabaks), and one in Basra Province for Christians. Although this ensured a degree of representation for minorities during the provincial elections in January 2009, the six allocated seats fell short of the United Nations' proposed 12 seats. Some community leaders expressed concern that the seats were allocated by majority groups as a token gesture and political maneuver and were not sufficient to ensure meaningful minority representation. Others asserted that the reserved seats disenfranchised and confused minority voters, who had to choose between voting for a minority-seat candidate and voting for a candidate running for a non-reserved seat. These factors appeared to contribute to low minority-voter turnout for the elections.

The Government increased the budget of the Directorate for non-Muslim Endowments, which will provide additional funds to renovate and protect minority religious sites. According to press reports, the Government launched a project to renovate the interior of the Shrine of Ezekiel, a prominent Jewish heritage site that Christians and Muslims also revere. According to the spokesman for the Ministry of Tourism, "The ministry is concerned with all Iraqi heritage, whether it is Christian or Jewish or from any other religion."

During the reporting period, government leaders spoke of the need for all citizens to unite--regardless of religious orientation--to confront terrorism. The Government publicly denounced incidents of sectarian violence and repeatedly

encouraged unity among the country's religious sects. Government leaders often emphasized their commitment to equal treatment for all religious groups and ethnicities.

On April 29, 2009, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) stated in response to the killing of three Christians in Kirkuk: "We Iraqis were all unhappy about the attack on Christian citizens in Kirkuk that led to the death of three innocent people who had done nothing wrong. Who is carrying out such actions that are intended to spread a spirit of discord, revenge, and disunity among sections of the Iraqi people that have coexisted for more than a thousand and several hundred years? Certainly they are the enemies of Iraq."

On April 15, 2009, Shiite Vice President Adel Abdul Mahdi stated that "the position of Iraqi Christians is vulnerable and Iraq must not be left alone to face this. It's a collective task...Christians are an integral part of Iraq. We need to help Iraq and help Christians remain in Iraq."

From October 12-14, 2008, in the wake of the murders of Christians in Mosul, Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi said that "Iraqis stand in solidarity with the Christians. All displaced families should return to their homes and all places of worship should be protected. Christians have the same rights as we have."

In response to the killing of Christians in Mosul in October 2008, prominent Shiite cleric Moqtada al Sadr sent representatives from Najaf to Baghdad to meet with church leaders and express solidarity. One of the representatives, Sheikh Muhanned al-Gharrawi, conveyed a message from Sadr that "we will not hesitate to turn into human shields for our Christian brothers."

On July 22, 2008, Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki made a statement to the media in support of the Christians in Iraq: "The Christian brothers in Iraq were exposed to discrimination. We stress that we do not discriminate between one Iraqi and another at all, between one Muslim and another, between a Christian and a Muslim, or between one ethnic group and another. In fact, we are proud of them and we need all of them. We are ready to provide them with special privileges in order to be in Iraq, especially since they are a part of the beautiful Iraqi mosaic of which we are proud. We will spare no effort to secure their return to Iraq, which is the homeland of their fathers and grandfathers. There is no discrimination at all and we will not tolerate this issue."

On July 25, 2008, Prime Minister Maliki met with Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican. The two discussed the security situation in Iraq, including the situation facing Iraqi Christians, and the need for dialogue and collaboration among all ethnic and religious groups, including minorities.

A March 25, 2009 amendment to the Kurdistan Regional Elections law provided for 11 of 111 seats in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament to be set aside for minorities-- five for Chaldeans and Assyrians, five for Turkmen, and one for Armenians.

In December 2008 the KRG took steps to promote religious tolerance and bar public "hate speech." During Israel's Gaza offensive, some Muslim religious leaders used their Friday sermons to exhort the congregation to acts of violence against Jews, Israelis, and the supporters of Israel. Some messages also decried the increasing appearance of Christmas decorations, lights, and holiday events. The KRG banned 15 imams from preaching.

On February 17, 2009, at a conference on Religious Freedom and Tolerance with participation of religious leaders from all faiths represented in the Kurdistan Region, KRG Prime Minister Barzani stated: "We are proud that our region has diverse ethnicities and religions. We have been living together for hundreds of years: Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Turcomen, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, and other components of our society. Religious tolerance is the symbol of all civilized and successful societies... We can respect our religious commitment and respect the religious commitment of those who worship differently. It is important that all of us in a position of responsibility encourage tolerance, coexistence, and ethnic and religious harmony. We believe in freedom of religious ceremonies of all faiths."

On November 19, 2008, the KRG announced the opening of a special directorate within the Ministry of Religious Affairs headed by a Yezidi Director General.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although these efforts affected all citizens, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to this pressure and violence because of their minority status and their lack of protection provided by a tribal structure. For example, Sabeen-Mandaeans, who are few in number and live in small groups spread across the country, continued to report that they were

targeted by Islamic militias. They were not able to defend themselves, since nonviolence is a basic tenet of their religion.

Sunni Muslims also continued to claim general discrimination during the reporting period, alleging that it was due to an ongoing campaign of revenge by the Shi'a majority for the Sunnis' presumed favored status and abuses of Shi'a under the former regime, and also because of the public's perception that the insurgency was composed primarily of Sunni extremists and former regime elements with whom the majority of the Sunni population supposedly sympathized. Although some within the Sunni community supported and even assisted the insurgency, there was a broad Sunni rejection of al-Qa'ida in Iraq as evidenced by their participation in the government, provincial elections, and the anti-insurgency Awakening Councils.

In general, minorities were underrepresented, especially at the provincial level, where they lacked full representation in the Provincial Councils, limiting their access to government-provided security and economic development. The January 2009 provincial elections helped somewhat to improve representation. Non-Muslims, particularly Christians and Yezidis, complained of being politically isolated by the Muslim majority because of their religious differences.

The combination of discriminatory hiring practices by members of the majority Muslim population, attacks against non-Muslim businesses, corruption, and the overall lack of rule of law also had a detrimental economic impact on the non-Muslim community and contributed to the departure of significant numbers of non-Muslims from the country.

Many Yezidi towns in Ninewa are in areas disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Government of Iraq and as a result suffer from poor municipal services, although the Kurdistan Regional Government fills some gaps, including payment of salaries for Yezidi religious instruction at certain state-funded schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government is committed to promoting religious freedom and continues to work closely with the Government on this as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials from the Department of State, the military, the Embassy, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) met regularly with representatives of all of the country's religious and ethnic communities, including its minority communities, and maintained an active dialogue.

The Department of State and the Embassy increased attention to the country's minority communities. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs for Iraq also serves as the Special Coordinator for Iraq's Minority Communities.

The U.S. Ambassador's Senior Advisors to Northern Iraq and Southern Iraq engaged religious minority communities in their areas. PRT officials, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and Multi-National Force-Iraq worked with department and embassy officials to address minority concerns. Embassy officials raised minority concerns in meetings with the country's senior government officials.

In the 2008 Foreign Operations Statement of Managers, Congress authorized \$10 million in unobligated Economic Support Fund money for Iraq to be directed toward projects in the Ninewa Plain region. During the reporting period, USAID used the funds to implement projects in education, microfinance, and infrastructure directly benefiting minority communities. PRT Ninewa has taken the lead in meeting a similar soft earmark for \$10 million in the FY2008 Supplemental budget, primarily through the PRT's Quick Response Fund (QRF) program to fund projects of benefit to local minority communities.

IRELAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 27,136 square miles and a population of 4.3 million. According to the 2006 census, the religious affiliation of the population is 86.8 percent Catholic, 2.9 percent Church of Ireland, 0.76 percent Muslim, 0.68 percent unspecified Christian, 0.55 percent Presbyterian, 0.49 percent Orthodox, 0.28 percent Methodist, less than 0.1 percent Jewish, and 6 percent unaffiliated.

An estimated 84,000 immigrants arrived in the country during the reporting period; almost half of these immigrants came from other European Union states. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin.

According to 2005 figures released by the Catholic Communications Office (CCO), approximately 60 percent of Catholics (including those in Northern Ireland) attend Mass once a week and 5 percent attend Mass once a day. The CCO reported a noticeable increase in attendance during Easter and Christmas holidays. In part because many priests are close to retirement, the Irish Catholic press predicted that the percentage of Catholics attending Mass regularly would decline in coming years. A similar survey conducted in 2005 by the Evangelical Alliance Ireland estimated that up to 30,000 evangelicals (comprising Baptists, members of Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, and charismatics) attend services each week.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution prohibits promotion of one religious group over another and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and the Government does not restrict the teaching or practice of any faith. There is no state religion.

The Constitution provides that "publication or utterance" of "blasphemous matter" is an offense punishable in accordance with law, but it does not define blasphemy. In the absence of legislation and in the uncertain state of the law, the courts have not prosecuted anyone for blasphemy in several years.

The Government observes St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day as national holidays.

There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the Government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religious belief or group.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Most primary and secondary schools are denominational, and their boards of management are governed partially by trustees who are member of the Catholic Church or, in fewer cases, the Church of Ireland or other religious denominations. Under the terms of the Constitution, the Department of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Islamic and Jewish schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum of most schools, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

In 2003 the Equality Authority declared that church-linked schools are permitted legally to refuse to admit a student who is not of that religious group if the school can prove that the refusal is essential to the maintenance of the "ethos" of the school (for example, too many Catholics in a Muslim school could prevent the school from having a Muslim "ethos"). However, there were no reports of any children being refused admission to any school for this reason. By law a religious school may select its staff based on their religious beliefs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

On November 26, 2008, a High Court judge directed that a Dublin hospital could, provided it was absolutely necessary, give a possibly life-saving blood transfusion to a 4-year-old girl, despite the religious objections of her Jehovah's Witnesses parents.

In September 2008 the Department of Education announced it would not issue a directive regarding a teenage student's request to wear the hijab. It stated that no school uniform policy should exclude students of a particular religious background from seeking a place or continuing in a school but that individual schools should have the ability to decide their own uniform rules. Subsequently, the school principal resolved that hijabs be consistent with the school uniform, and the student continued attending classes.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

On March 12, 2009, the *Metro Eireann* newspaper reported that some restaurants refused to employ bearded Sikhs. It also cited a case of a teenage male Sikh student who was asked to shave his beard. The newspaper published no further details.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued its engagement program aimed at fostering greater understanding of political, social, cultural, and religious views prevalent among Muslims in the country.

Embassy officials met regularly with Muslims and participated in several events hosted by both embassy staff and Muslim groups. Embassy officials also met with members of the Jewish community and prominent leaders of Catholic and Protestant religious groups to discuss ways of promoting religious freedom and to survey the level of religious freedom experienced by the various religious groups. The Embassy's fifth annual interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue and understanding of religious freedom among governmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations as well as among religious and community leaders; the reception also assisted government outreach to minority groups.

ISRAEL

A report on the Occupied Territories (including areas subject to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority) is appended at the end of this report.

The Israeli Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for freedom of worship and the Government generally respected this right in practice. While there is no constitution, government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion.

While the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty does not specifically refer to freedom of religion, it does refer to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which explicitly provides for the protection of religious freedom. In addition, numerous Supreme Court rulings incorporate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including their religious freedom provisions, into the country's body of law. The Declaration describes the country as a Jewish state, establishing Judaism as the dominant religion while also promising full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation. The Basic Law describes the country as a "Jewish and democratic state." Government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion, although governmental and legal discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government was unchanged during the reporting period. Government allocations of state resources favored Orthodox (including Modern and National Religious streams of Orthodoxy) and ultra-Orthodox (sometimes referred to as "Haredi") Jewish religious groups and institutions, discriminating against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism. Officials at the Ministry of the Interior blocked three Messianic Jews (persons who identify as Jews and follow Jewish traditions but who believe Jesus was the Messiah) seeking to immigrate to the country under the Law of Return and continued to differentiate between Jews and non-Jews on national identification documents.

Some individuals and groups committed abusive and discriminatory practices against Israeli-Arab Muslims, evangelical Christians, and Messianic Jews at the same elevated level cited in the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report. Relations among religious and ethnic groups--between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, secular and religious Jews, and

among the different streams of Judaism--often were strained during the reporting period. This was due primarily to the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Government's unequal treatment of non-Orthodox Jews, including the Government's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Based on its pre-1967 borders, the country has an area of 7,685 square miles. The country has a population of 7.4 million (including settlers living in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem), of which 5.6 million are Jews, 1.5 million are Arab Muslims and Christians, and 320,000 are classified as "other"--mostly persons from the former Soviet Union who immigrated under the Law of Return but who did not qualify as Jews according to the Orthodox Jewish definition used by the Government for civil procedures.

According to figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics for 2007, the latest year such information was available, 7 percent of the Jewish population is ultra-Orthodox, 10 percent is Orthodox, 39 percent describe themselves as "traditional religious" or "traditional non-religious," and 44 percent describe themselves as "non-religious/secular" Jews, most of whom observe some Jewish traditions. It also estimates that 30 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside the country. A growing but still small number of traditional and secular Jews associate themselves with the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism. Although not officially recognized for purposes of civil and personal status matters, groups composed of adherents of these streams of Judaism received a small amount of government funding and were recognized by the courts. There is a small but growing community of approximately 10,000 Messianic Jews.

Slightly more than 20 percent of the population is non-Jewish, the vast majority of whom are ethnic Arabs. Of the total population, Muslims (nearly all Sunnis) constitute 16.5 percent, Christians 2.1 percent; Druze 1.7 percent; other religious groups 0.5 percent, including relatively small communities of, among others, Messianic Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baha'is.

The Government reported that during 2008 it issued nearly 100,000 permits for foreigners to work in the country, and estimated that another 80,000 to 150,000

illegal foreign workers resided in the country. Foreign workers are members of many different religious groups, including Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic traditions.

Section II. Status of Governmental Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The country has no Constitution. While the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty does not specifically refer to freedom of religion, it does refer to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which explicitly provides for the protection of religious freedom. In addition, numerous Supreme Court rulings incorporate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including their religious freedom provisions, into the country's body of law. The Declaration describes the country as a Jewish state, establishing Judaism as the dominant religion while also promising full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation. The Basic Law describes the country as a "Jewish and democratic state." Government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion, although governmental and legal discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued.

Since the founding of the country, the Government has recognized three additional religious communities--the Druze in 1957, the evangelical Episcopal Church in 1970, and the Baha'i in 1971. The fact that the Muslim population was not defined as a religious community was a vestige of the Ottoman period when Islam was the dominant religion and it has not limited Muslims from practicing their faith. A collection of ad hoc arrangements with various government agencies defined the status of several Christian denominations with representation in the country. The Government allows members of unrecognized religious groups the freedom to practice their religious beliefs.

The state does not recognize conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. The Government provides funds for Orthodox conversion programs but does not provide support for non-Orthodox (i.e. Reform and Conservative) programs. The High Court ruled on May 18, 2009, that the Government must cease discriminating against non-Orthodox conversion institutes. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) sponsored Orthodox Jewish conversion courses for Jewish soldiers who received non-Orthodox (and therefore unrecognized) conversions and for soldiers not recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox rabbinical

authorities. Residency rights were not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except for children of female converts who are born after the mother's conversion is complete.

While the law safeguards the "holy places of all religions," the Government provides significantly greater levels of legal protection and government resources to Jewish holy places than to those of other religious groups and to Orthodox Jews over non-Orthodox Jews.

The law considers "religious communities" to be those recognized by, and carried over from, the British Mandate period (1920-48), during which Great Britain administered present-day Israel and the Occupied Territories. These include: Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean (Chaldean Uniate Catholic), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Jewish.

The Government implements some policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law which thereby discriminates against citizens adhering to other religious groups. The priority given to Orthodox Jewish interpretation was a requirement in the "status quo" agreement reached at the founding of the state between the country's founders and the mainstream Orthodox rabbinical councils, which has been upheld throughout the state's history.

For example, the only in-country Jewish marriages the Government recognizes are those performed by the Orthodox Jewish establishment; and the Government does not allow civil marriages (e.g., secular ceremonies performed by state or municipal authorities) or marriages performed by Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist rabbis. Exclusive control over marriages--including eligibility for marriage and the performance of marriage rites--resides by law with recognized bodies of the recognized religious denominations. Civil marriages, non-Orthodox marriages of Jews, or interfaith marriages must take place abroad in order to be recognized by the Government. However, the Government stated in 2007 that it allows consular marriages, performed by officials of foreign embassies in the country, for persons who are classified as having no religion or belonging to a religious community not recognized by the state. According to New Family Organization, a non-governmental organization (NGO), more than 5,000 couples marry in civil ceremonies abroad each year, primarily in Cyprus. The Orthodox Jewish establishment also determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered Jewish by Orthodox standards.

Members of unrecognized religious groups, particularly evangelical Christians, faced problems in obtaining marriage certifications or burial services that are similar to the problems faced by Jews who were not considered Jewish by the Orthodox establishment. Informal arrangements with other recognized religious groups provide relief in some cases.

Proselytizing is legal in the country and missionaries of all religious groups are allowed to proselytize all citizens. However, a 1977 law prohibits any person from offering material benefits as an inducement to conversion. It is also illegal to convert persons under 18 years of age unless one parent is an adherent of the religious group seeking to convert the minor. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), under a longstanding agreement with the Government, voluntarily refrains from all proselytizing.

With some exceptions, each officially recognized religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. Legislation enacted in 1961 afforded the Shari'a courts exclusive jurisdiction to rule in matters of personal status concerning Muslims. For unrecognized religious groups, no local religious tribunals exercise jurisdiction over their members in matters of personal status. Only recognized religious communities receive government funding for their religious services.

A Muslim woman may petition for and receive a divorce through the Shari'a courts without her husband's consent under certain conditions, and a marriage contract may provide for other cases where she may obtain a divorce without her husband's consent. A Muslim man may divorce his wife without her consent and without petitioning the court.

The Government, through the Chief Rabbinate, discriminates against women in civil status matters related to marriage and divorce. Under the Jewish religious court's interpretation of personal status law, a Jewish woman may not receive a final writ of divorce without her husband's consent. Consequently, thousands of women, so-called *agunot*--"chained women"--are unable to remarry or have legitimate children because their husbands have either disappeared or refused to grant divorces. Rabbinical tribunals had the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept divorce from their husbands, but they could not grant a divorce without the husband's consent, and women could not seek redress in civil courts. Following years of pressure by women's rights advocates, on November 5, 2008, the Knesset closed the financial extortion loophole in the law on divorce by stating that assets

can be divided during the Rabbinate's divorce proceedings, rather than after the husband grants a divorce. Some husbands have used the law to extort their wives by demanding a personally favorable distribution of property and financial assets as a condition for agreeing to a divorce.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law applies to holy sites of all religious groups within the country and in all of Jerusalem, but the Government implements regulations only for Jewish sites. Non-Jewish holy sites do not enjoy legal protection under it because the Government does not recognize them as official holy sites. At the end of 2008, there were 137 designated holy sites, all of which were Jewish. Furthermore, the Government has drafted regulations to identify, protect, and fund only Jewish holy sites. While well-known sites have de facto protection as a result of their international importance, many Muslim and Christian sites are neglected, inaccessible, or threatened by property developers and municipalities. The Christian pilgrimage sites around the Sea of Galilee face periodic threats of encroachment from district planners who want to use parts of their properties for recreation. In the past, only diplomatic interventions have forestalled such efforts. Such sites do, however, enjoy certain protections under the general Penal Law (criminal code), which makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site. Following a 2007 order by the High Court to explain its unequal implementation of the 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law, the Government responded in March 2008 that specific regulations were not necessary for the protection of any holy sites. The Government did not explain why it therefore promulgated regulations for Jewish sites but not for non-Jewish sites.

The country's airline El Al and public buses in every city except Haifa did not operate on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath; however, several private bus companies did operate during the reporting period. Additionally, streets in most ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods were closed to vehicles on the Sabbath. According to the Law on Work and Rest Hours of 1951, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in April 2005, Jews in most professions were prohibited from working on the Sabbath unless granted a special permit by the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor. However, the Government does not usually enforce the law. The state transportation company, Egged, which operates the country's public transportation system, continued to operate sex-segregated busses along city and intra-city routes frequented by ultra-Orthodox Jews. Women who refuse to sit at the back of such busses risk harassment and physical assault by male passengers.

Governmental authorities prohibit mixed gender prayer services at religious sites in deference to the belief of most Orthodox Jews that such services violate the

precepts of Judaism. At the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism, men and women must use separate areas to visit and pray. Women also are not allowed to conduct prayers at the Western Wall while wearing prayer shawls, which are typically worn by Jewish men, and are not permitted to read from Torah scrolls.

The law permits the Government to subsidize approximately 60 percent of the expenses incurred by ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools, despite their regular failure to implement a governmental requirement that all state-funded schools teach core subjects, such as English, mathematics, and science.

The Government funds the construction of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries. According to the Government, while the state budget does not cover the costs of construction for non-Jewish places of worship, it does provide some assistance for their maintenance, although at a disproportionately lower level than for synagogues. In some areas, the Government allows private citizens or municipalities to turn old mosques into galleries, restaurants, and museums.

Government resources available for religious/heritage studies to Arab and non-Orthodox Jewish public schools are significantly less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. According to the Israel Religious Action Committee (IRAC), in 2006 approximately 96 percent of all state funds for Jewish religious education were allocated to Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools. Public and private Arab schools offer studies in both Islam and Christianity, but the state funding for such studies is proportionately less than the funding for religious education courses in Jewish schools.

In May 2009, the rabbinical courts presented the Justice Ministry a bill for its review, seeking to secure in law their claim to jurisdiction over financial matters in arbitration of property disputes between a divorced husband and wife. Currently, no religious group possesses such financial authority. The Government stated that its endorsement of the bill was in accordance with its coalition agreement with the Sephardic ultra-Orthodox Shas party. The Supreme Court ruled in April 2006 that Jewish rabbinical courts do not have the authority to arbitrate in any financial dispute. Although the rabbinical courts have ruled on financial matters since before the establishment of the state, their jurisdiction on these matters has never been established in law. The Justice Ministry's review of the draft legislation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The Government observes the following Jewish holy days as national holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simhat Torah, Passover, and Shavuot. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

The Government employs civilian non-Jewish clergy as chaplains at military burials when a non-Muslim or non-Jewish soldier dies in service. The Interior Ministry provides imams to conduct funerals according to Muslim customs. All Jewish chaplains in the IDF are Orthodox. The IDF does not have any Muslim or Christian chaplains because, according to government sources, the frequent home leave accorded to all soldiers allows Muslim and Christian soldiers easy and regular access to their respective clergy and religious services at home.

Military service is compulsory only for Jews, Druze, and the 5,000 member Circassian community (Muslims from the northwestern Caucasus region who immigrated to various points in the Ottoman-controlled Middle East in the late nineteenth century). Ultra-Orthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs--both Muslim and Christian--are exempt. The majority of Israeli Arabs opt not to serve in the army; however, some Christian and Muslim Arab citizens, mainly Bedouin, serve as volunteers. As of June 2007, Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews can perform national service for one to two years as volunteers in health, education, or welfare sectors in lieu of military service. This service confers eligibility for similar national benefits accorded military veterans. Israeli-Arab advocacy groups, Knesset members, and local community leaders have charged that housing, educational, and other benefits, as well as employment preferences based on military experience, effectively discriminate in favor of the Jewish population, the majority of which serves in the military.

According to the Government watchdog group Movement for Quality in Government, between 2002 and 2007, 1,520 ultra-Orthodox men chose to enter the workforce through programs mandated by the Tal Law, while 50,000 continued to study in yeshivas. According to IDF figures released in July 2007, approximately 11 percent of all male candidates for military service had deferments as full-time yeshiva students, up from 7.3 percent in 2000.

The Arrangements Law, drafted annually to guide government spending, exempts recognized religious groups from paying municipal taxes for any place of worship. Exemption from tax payments was also granted to some groups that have not been officially recognized by law. However, the Government has generally interpreted the exemption from municipal taxes to apply only to the portion of the property of

religious organizations actually used for worship. Some not-for-profit religious organizations also receive tax exemptions.

Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may also file such cases in religious courts. Family status matters are normally the purview of religious courts, but Jewish, Druze, and Christian families may ask for some cases, such as alimony and child custody in divorces, to be adjudicated in civil courts. Muslims have the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce to civil courts in family-status cases. However, paternity cases are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts.

Jewish rabbinical courts may not arbitrate property disputes between a divorced husband and wife. Although they had done so since before the establishment of the state, the Supreme Court ruled in April 2006 that they have no jurisdiction over financial matters. The Justice Ministry's review of government endorsed draft legislation submitted by the rabbinical courts was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The Ministry of the Interior has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups, while the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of non-Jewish holy sites. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has jurisdiction over the country's 133 Jewish religious councils, which oversee the provision of religious services for Jewish communities. A single non-Jewish religious council exists for the Druze and is overseen by the Interior Ministry's Department of Non-Jewish Affairs. Legislation establishing religious councils does not include non-Jewish religious communities other than the Druze. Instead, the Ministry of the Interior provides a limited amount of direct funds for religious services for recognized non-Jewish communities. The Government continues to finance approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets and local authorities funded the remainder.

Public Hebrew-speaking secular schools teach Jewish history and Jewish religious texts. These classes primarily cover Jewish heritage and culture, rather than religious belief. Public Arabic-speaking schools with Arab student bodies teach mandatory classes on the Qur'an and the Bible, since both Muslim and Christian Arabs attend these schools. Orthodox Jewish religious schools that are part of the public school system teach mandatory religion classes, as do private ultra-Orthodox schools that receive significant state funding. The few private mixed

Jewish-Arab schools that exist have proven to be successful for both Arabs and Jews.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants immigration and residence rights to individuals who meet established criteria defining Jewish identity. Included in this definition is a child or grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew, and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew. The Government uses a separate, more rigorous standard based on Orthodox Jewish criteria to determine the right to full citizenship, entitlement to government financial support for immigrants, the legitimacy of conversions to Judaism performed within the country, and Jewish status for purposes of personal and some civil status issues.

Although identification cards do not carry a religion or nationality designation, the Interior Ministry distinguishes between Jews and non-Jews on identification cards by printing the birth date of Jews in Hebrew letters according to the Jewish calendar while listing that of others according to the Gregorian calendar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion, although government discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued.

For example, the Government continued to discriminate against non-Orthodox Jewish citizens through some policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. Many Jewish citizens objected to exclusive Orthodox control over fundamental aspects of their personal lives. Approximately 310,000 citizens who immigrated under the Law of Return but are not considered Jewish by the Orthodox Rabbinate cannot be married, divorced, or buried in Jewish cemeteries within the country. A 1996 law requiring the Government to establish civil cemeteries remained inadequately implemented.

Restrictions on access to non-Jewish religious sites, as well as limits on funding and protection of those sites, also contributed to religious tensions. While officially legal, some missionaries continued to face harassment and discrimination from some local government officials.

During Jewish holidays, following terrorist attacks, and in response to other potential threats, the Government imposed closures to restrict travel for the stated

purpose of providing security. These closures impeded access to holy sites in Israel, the West Bank, and Jerusalem.

During the reporting period, members of many religious groups traveled to the country freely. However, according to representatives of Christian institutions, visa issuance rates for some of their religious workers remained low. Continuing a policy enacted in October 2007, the Interior Ministry refused to grant multiple-entry visas for members of the clergy and other religious workers seeking to travel to and between their parishes in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Clergy who wished to return to or visit their parishes and congregations were required to apply for new, single-entry visas at Israeli consulates abroad, a process that could take months. Following an unsuccessful appeal by the Vatican in advance of Pope Benedict XVI's May 2009 visit to the country, the Interior Ministry stated that multiple-entry visas for clergy and other religious workers constituted a security threat and would not be issued.

Since the Government did not have diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Muslim citizens traveled through another country, usually Jordan, to obtain travel documents for performing the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). The average annual number of Hajj pilgrims traveling from the country in recent years was approximately 4,500. Saudi Arabian authorities determined the overall number allowed to participate in the Hajj. According to the Government, travel to hostile countries, including travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj, may be restricted; however, these restrictions were based on security concerns rather than on any religious or ethnic factors.

According to government figures, the 2008 budget for religious services and religious institutions for the Jewish population was approximately 1.6 billion shekels (\$457 million). Religious minorities, which constituted slightly more than 20 percent of the population, received approximately 65 million shekels (\$18.6 million), or just less than 4 percent of total funding.

The Supreme Court ruled on March 9, 2009 that implementing regulations to protect Islamic holy sites are unnecessary. In its ruling, the court registered the Government's commitment to provide annual funding of \$526,000 (2 million shekels), and dismissed--on the strength of the Government's commitment--the 2004 petition of the Arab-Israeli legal advocacy group Adalah that implementing regulations were required. Adalah had charged that all of the locations designated as holy sites were Jewish and that the Government's failure to draft implementing regulations to protect non-Jewish sites had resulted in the desecration and their

conversion to other uses of individual Muslim sites. In August 2007 the Supreme Court had directed the Government to explain its failure to protect Islamic holy sites and provide funds for their maintenance.

Responding to petitions against the May 2008 High Rabbinical Court's annulment of the conversions of all 40,000 people who converted under the auspices of the state-sanctioned Orthodox conversion courts since 1999, the High Court on May 19, 2009 ordered the High Rabbinical Court to explain its decision within 90 days. The High Rabbinical Court, which disputes the secular High Court's jurisdiction over the issue, had not answered by the end of the reporting period. The May 2008 ruling alleged lax standards under the High Rabbinical Court's previous director, Rabbi Haim Druckman. In February 2008 a ministerial committee on conversions had established a new Conversion Authority--headed by Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar--to appoint and oversee the work of state-sanctioned Orthodox religious judges who evaluate the bona fides of would-be converts to Judaism. Amar also heads the High Rabbinical Court. Critics charged that the appointment of Amar to be in charge of the Conversion Authority effectively erased years of progress toward broadening the official definition of Jewishness and solidified the Orthodox establishment's hold on matters of Jewish identity.

In order to marry in government-recognized ceremonies, Jews had to undergo marriage counseling administered by the Orthodox religious authorities. As part of this counseling, all Jews--including the secular majority and those who practice reform or conservative Judaism--were instructed to respect traditional Orthodox family roles. A brochure used in the counseling during the reporting period compared women to clay and urged the husband to "shape and mold her as he pleases." The husband is also instructed not to become "spineless" or tolerate disrespectful behavior from his wife: "If she is disrespectful you must not give in; you can become angry and stop talking to her until she realizes she is wrong." The husband is also admonished to compliment his wife regularly, "even if it is a lie," because "a woman who has not been complimented is like a fish out of water."

As in previous reporting periods, the Religious Affairs Ministry failed to implement the 1996 Alternative Burial Law that established the right of any individual to be buried in a civil ceremony, and did not utilize any of the money allocated in the 2008 state budget for the development of civil/secular burial plots. There were only two public cemeteries available to the approximately 310,000 citizens, mostly immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who immigrated under the Law of Return but are not considered Jewish according to the Orthodox Jewish

authorities. In January 2008 the Jerusalem municipality approved plans to establish a new city cemetery for use by secular citizens free of charge.

In December 2008 the Government and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) concluded negotiations that followed the LWF's appeal to the Supreme Court of the District Court's 2002 revocation of its tax-exempt status. The agreement stipulated that the Government would eliminate all back-taxes claimed by the tax authority in return for LWF, a not-for-profit religious organization, agreeing to commence payment of employment taxes starting January 1, 2009. LWF's hospital on the Mount of Olives had enjoyed tax exempt status for almost 40 years.

The state transportation company, Egged, which operates the country's public transportation system, continued to operate sex-segregated busses along inter- and intra-city routes frequented by ultra-Orthodox Jews. Women who refused to sit at the back of such busses risked harassment and physical assault by male passengers.

On June 28, 2009, the Ministerial Committee on Legislation approved a bill that, if passed by the legislature, would require that funding of two factions' ultra-Orthodox private schools be provided from the budgets of local authorities. The Committee's approval of the bill contrasted with a High Court warning that the ultra-Orthodox schools would be ineligible for government funding if they did not implement by the beginning of the 2008-09 school year a governmental requirement that all state-funded schools teach core subjects, such as English, mathematics, and science. The warning followed many years of the state-subsidized ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools failure to implement the core curriculum. The schools that would benefit from the proposed bill belong to the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism faction and the ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Shas faction. Similarly, on July 23, 2008, the Knesset passed legislation that would allow the state to continue financing approximately 60 percent of the expenses of ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools, despite their regular failure to implement the core curriculum.

Muslim residents of the Be'er Sheva area continued to protest the municipality's intention to reopen the city's old mosque as a museum rather than as a mosque for the area's Muslim residents. The High Court rejected a petition from the Israeli-Arab legal advocacy NGO Adalah, representing the area's Muslim community, to enjoin the municipality from renovating the mosque into a museum. In July 2006 the High Court proposed a compromise whereby the mosque would be used as a museum of Islamic culture. In January 2007 Adalah rejected the court proposal, arguing that there was a need to uphold the religious rights of area Muslims.

Adalah's response to the court observed that while there was one synagogue for every 700 Jews in Be'er Sheva, there was not a single mosque for the city's 5,000 Muslims. The case remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

The approximately 80,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages were unable to build or legally maintain mosques as a result of longstanding government policy to deny ownership claims, building requests, and municipal services in such communities. Mosques existed in unrecognized Bedouin communities but as with homes and other community structures, the Government considered them illegal and therefore subject to demolition. For example, the first mud and straw mosque to be built in the country received demolition orders on August 21, 2008 in the unrecognized village of Wadi El Na'am in the Negev, and Israeli authorities demolished it on December 24, 2008.

The 14-year-old negotiations between the Government and the Holy See concerning the Fundamental Agreement were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. These negotiations addressed tax exemptions for Roman Catholic institutions and property (churches, monasteries, convents, and educational and social welfare organizations) and the access of such institutions to Israeli courts. The Fundamental Agreement that was negotiated in 1993 establishing relations between the Holy See and the Government was still awaiting Knesset ratification.

On October 29, 2008, the High Court ruled that the Simon Wiesenthal Center could continue construction at a site several Muslim organizations disputed because it contained a centuries-old Muslim cemetery. Supporters of the U.S.-based center had cited an 1894 ruling by the Shari'a court, which stated that because the cemetery was abandoned, it was no longer sacred.

The legal defense NGO, Jerusalem Institute of Justice (JIJ), alleged again this reporting period that officials in the Interior Ministry denied services to some citizens based on their religious beliefs. The JIJ's legal defense caseload included numerous cases dealing with attempts by the Interior Ministry to revoke the citizenship of persons discovered holding Messianic or Christian beliefs, or to deny some national services--such as welfare benefits or passports--to such persons. In other cases the JIJ alleged that the Interior Ministry refused to process immigration applications from persons entitled to citizenship under the Law of Return if it was determined such persons held Christian or Messianic Jewish religious beliefs. On May 13, 2009, the JIJ filed a petition to the High Court on behalf of three Messianic Jews under the Law of Return whose application for immigration was blocked by the Ministry of Interior. They cited an April 2008 High Court ruling,

which stated that the Government could not deny status to a person eligible to immigrate under the Law of Return on the basis of that person's identification as a Messianic Jew, provided that person was not also considered Jewish under the Orthodox definition. The case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting period, terrorist organizations, including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, carried out regular attacks against Israeli citizens, mostly in the form of indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip. On at least one occasion, a rocket from Gaza killed an Israeli Muslim. Terrorists often issued statements that contained anti-Semitic rhetoric in conjunction with the attacks.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 18, 2009, the High Court ruled that the Government must stop discriminating against non-Orthodox conversion institutes in regard to state funding. The decision came in response to a 2005 petition by IRAC.

In January 2009 the Education Ministry approved the accreditation of the country's first fully independent Arab university, Mar Elias College. The university is operated by the Melkite (Eastern rite) Catholic Church and provides a higher education curriculum oriented toward coexistence for a diverse faculty and student body of Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

On November 10, 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that the refusal of the state transportation company, Egged, and its advertising company Canaan, to allow a political party to post campaign advertisements featuring images of women on its busses in Jerusalem was discriminatory and ordered Egged and Canaan to accept the two candidates' advertisements. The women, both candidates in the November

2008 Jerusalem municipal elections, were told that their pictures might offend ultra-Orthodox residents who frequent intra-city routes for which Egged operates sex-segregated busses.

In September 2008 the police reissued a 1999 directive to police precincts throughout the country reminding them of their duty to fully investigate crimes against minority religious communities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Jewish-Arab tensions remained at approximately the same level as in recent years. However, tensions between some Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities and evangelical Christians and Messianic Jewish communities grew significantly during 2007 and 2008, and maintained their elevated levels through the end of the reporting period.

Relations among other religious and ethnic groups, including Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, and secular and religious Jews, also continued to be strained. Such religious and ethnic tensions are the result of historical grievances as well as cultural and religious differences, and they have been compounded by the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has included terrorist attacks targeting Jewish civilians, IDF operations in the Occupied Territories, incidents of Jewish militants targeting Israeli-Arabs, and incidents of Israeli-Arab involvement in terrorist activity.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the reporting period. In particular, members of Orthodox Jewish groups treated non-Orthodox Jews with manifestations of discrimination and intolerance. As in past years, ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem and other ultra-Orthodox enclaves threw rocks at passing motorists driving on the Sabbath and periodically harassed or assaulted women whose appearance they considered immodest, including by throwing acid on them.

Society's attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion generally were negative. Most Jews were opposed to missionary activity directed at Jews, and some were hostile to Jewish converts to Christianity. While proselytism is officially legal, missionaries continued to face harassment and discrimination by some Jewish activists and organizations. The Messianic Jewish and Jehovah's Witnesses communities, among others, accused groups such as Yad L'Achim and Lev L'Achim, and Jewish religious organizations opposed to missionary activity,

of harassing and occasionally assaulting their members. According to Yad L'Achim's annual report for 2008, quoted in the newspaper *Yom L'Yom*, the organization "saved 174 souls from the clutches of the [Messianic and evangelical] mission" during the year. The organization's semi-clandestine Counter-Missionary Department, headed by Rabbi Alex Artovski, also claimed to have dozens of informants and infiltrators in the Government and in Christian or Messianic Jewish congregations, enabling the organization to force the closure of 18 religious meeting places and expel 12 "top-ranking" missionaries from the country during 2008. According to JIJ attorneys and representatives of affected religious communities, Yad L'Achim succeeded in such activities by pressuring landlords, employers and Interior Ministry officials to assist its campaign against groups it deemed "dangerous cults."

Despite harassment, the number of Messianic Jews and evangelical Christians has grown in recent years through both immigration and conversion. During the reporting period, however, increased press reporting and complaints from religious freedom activists indicated a corresponding increase in Yad L'achim and associated activism, and a growing wider backlash against the presence of evangelical Christian or Messianic Jewish congregations and missionaries living in Jewish communities. Exacerbating these tensions was the widespread but false belief that proselytizing is illegal in the country.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported an increase in assaults and other crimes against their membership in 2008 and noted the difficulties their members faced convincing the police to investigate or apprehend the perpetrators. Between September 2007 and September 2008, members of Jehovah's Witnesses filed 46 criminal complaints against anti-missionary activists, most of them members of Yad L'Achim. The crimes ranged from harassment to assault. Police stated that they responded to 15 of 35 calls for assistance during the same time period, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses legal department. The JIJ noted a similar trend regarding crimes committed against members of the congregations it represents.

On June 10, 2009 the Be'er Sheva District Court handed down sentences to two defendants charged with assaulting the pastor of a Messianic congregation in Be'er Sheva and damaging property. Members of the congregation filed charges against the assailants after a witness to the assault filed a report with the Be'er Shiva police in December 2005. Earlier that month, a witness reported that a group of approximately 200 Orthodox Jews had violently disrupted the religious service of

that congregation in Be'er Sheva. According to the account, the group pushed and slapped the congregation's pastor and damaged property.

On May 15, 2009, ultra-Orthodox residents of the Tel Aviv suburb of Rehovot attacked and beat a group of Messianic Jews who were handing out New Testament pamphlets on the street. According to press reports, secular passers-by joined in the beating before police intervened to stop them.

On December 21, 2008, unknown vandals painted swastikas and Russian graffiti on doors and in classrooms of the Lev Simcha yeshiva in Ashdod. Police refused to reveal the contents of the graffiti, citing shock at its graphic nature. A police investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On December 20, 2008, unknown vandals painted anti-Muslim and anti-Arab graffiti--including slogans such as "Mohammed is a pig"; "death to Arabs"; and "Kahane was right," a reference to the founder of the outlawed Jewish terrorist organization Kach--on the doors and walls of the Al-Bahar mosque in Jaffa. A police investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On October 8, 2008, violence erupted between Israeli Jews and Arabs in the city of Acre (Akko) at the beginning of the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur after an Arab resident drove into a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Driving on Yom Kippur is prohibited with the exception of emergency vehicles. Rioting ensued for several days, as Jewish and Arab extremists incited their communities against one another. While the inflammatory rhetoric was mutual, the majority of those inciting violence were Jewish, according to the Northern District police commander. According to press reports, both communities suffered significant property damage, and several Arab families were displaced from their homes in or near Jewish neighborhoods. Police continued to pursue and arrest the chief instigators after the violence subsided. On October 20, 2008, police arrested six young Jewish men in Tel Aviv for allegedly firebombing two Arab homes in an attempt to spread the anti-Arab incitement to Jaffa and other mixed neighborhoods around Tel Aviv.

On August 13, 2008, unknown arsonists attacked the Beit Yaakov Synagogue in the Tel Aviv suburb of Bnei Brak, destroying the synagogue's Torah scrolls.

On November 10, 2008, two defendants were sentenced to two months imprisonment, suspended for three years, plus 150 hours of community service for their part in a 2006 incident where approximately 100 ultra-Orthodox Jews

assaulted approximately 50 Christian tourists in a Jerusalem neighborhood, injuring three.

Numerous NGOs in the country remained dedicated to promoting Jewish-Arab coexistence and interfaith harmony. Their programs included events to increase productive contact between religious groups and to promote Jewish-Arab dialogue and cooperation. For example, the "House of Hope" in the Galilee town of Shfaram near Haifa, founded by Elias Jabbour, engaged Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities in dialogue. Also, Father Elias Chacour, a Greek Catholic priest in the village of Ibellin in western Galilee, founded a secondary school with Christian and Muslim students and several Jewish faculty members. These groups and their events had varying degrees of success. Interfaith dialogue often was linked to ongoing peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians and between the country and its Arab neighbors. A number of NGOs sought to build understanding and create dialogue among religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. These organizations include the Gesher Foundation (Hebrew for "bridge"); Meitarim, which operated a pluralistic Jewish-oriented school system; the Interreligious Coordinating Council, which promoted interfaith dialogue among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian institutions; and the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, comprising the chief religious authorities of the area's Jewish, Muslim, and Christian establishments.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy consistently raised concerns of religious freedom with the Foreign Ministry, the police, the Prime Minister's office, and other government agencies.

Embassy officials maintained a dialogue with NGOs that follow human and civil rights matters, including religious freedom, and promote interfaith initiatives. Embassy representatives also attended and spoke at meetings of such organizations.

ITALY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. There is no state religion; however, due to its sovereign status and historical political authority, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys some privileges not available to other religious groups.

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were reports of societal anti-Semitism following the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip. Prominent religious and government officials continued to encourage mutual respect for religious differences.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 116,347 square miles and a population of 59.6 million. An estimated 87 percent of native-born citizens are Roman Catholic, but only 20 percent regularly participate in worship services. Members of non-Catholic Christian groups, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'i Faith adherents, and Buddhists constitute less than 5 percent of the population. Significant Christian communities include Christian Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assembly of God, the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and other small Protestant groups.

Immigration--both legal and illegal--continued to add large groups of non-Christian residents, mainly Muslims, from North Africa, South Asia, Albania, and the Middle East. According to an independent research center in 2008, 1.3 million immigrants were Christian Orthodox, 1.25 million Muslim, 0.14 million Protestant, and 0.1 million Hindu or Buddhist.

The Ministry of the Interior reported that there are 258 places of worship for Muslims (mainly "garage" mosques) concentrated in the regions of Lombardy,

Veneto, Lazio, Emilia Romagna, and Tuscany. The Jewish community is estimated at 30,000 and maintains synagogues in 21 cities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government recognizes the Holy See as a sovereign authority. Under the 1984 revision of the concordat with the Catholic Church, the state is secular but maintains the practice of state support for religion, which also could be extended, if requested, to non-Catholic confessions. In such cases, state support is to be governed by legislation implementing the provisions of an *intesa* (accord) between the Government and the religious group. An *intesa* grants clergy automatic access to state hospitals, prisons, and military barracks; allows for civil registry of religious marriages; facilitates special religious practices regarding funerals; and exempts students from school attendance on religious holidays. If a religious community so requests, an *intesa* may provide for state routing of funds, through a voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns, to that community. The absence of an *intesa* does not affect a religious group's ability to worship freely; however, the privileges granted by an *intesa* are not always granted automatically, and a religious community without an *intesa* does not benefit financially from the voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns.

Groups with an *intesa* include the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, Adventists, Assembly of God, Jews, Baptists, and Lutherans. In 2007 the Government signed accords with the Buddhist Union, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apostolic Church, Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate, and Hindus. On the same date, the Government amended previous *intese* with the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches and the Adventists. The 2007 new and amended *intese* must be approved by the Council of Ministers and then submitted to Parliament for ratification; however, at the end of the reporting period the Government had taken no action. Negotiations remained suspended with the Soka Gakkai, a Japanese Buddhist group, pending their reorganization. Divisions among Muslim organizations, as well as the existence of multiple Muslim immigrant groups, hindered that community's efforts to seek an *intesa*.

The law provides all religious groups the right to be recognized as a legal entity and be granted the fiscal exempt status. Clergy registered by the Ministry of Interior are authorized to celebrate marriages recognized by civil authorities.

Insults against all divinities are considered blasphemy, a crime punished by a fine.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

The 2005 Antiterrorism Decree, which penalizes those who attempt to hide their identity, may impinge on those who choose to wear attire such as a burqa; however, Muslim women are free to wear the veil in public. Individuals are also forbidden to hide their identities under a seldom-used 1931 law.

On March 26, 2009, the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill which forbids assisted suicide and introduces the possibility of expressing living wills for medical treatments in case of terminal illness, valid for three years, to be interpreted and implemented by doctors. Nutrition and hydration remain compulsory, as requested by some Catholic leaders.

The Government provides funds for the construction of places of worship, grants public land for their construction, and helps preserve and maintain historic places of worship that shelter much of the country's artistic and cultural heritage.

Missionaries or religious workers must apply for appropriate visas prior to arriving in the country.

The revised concordat of 1984 accords the Catholic Church certain privileges regarding instruction in public schools. For example, the Church is allowed to select Catholic teachers, paid by the state, to provide instruction in "hour of religion" courses taught in the public schools. Such courses are optional, and students who do not wish to attend are free to study other subjects or, in certain cases, to leave school early. While in the past this instruction involved Catholic priests teaching catechism, church-selected instructors may now be either lay or religious, and their instruction is intended to include material relevant to non-Catholic religious groups. Problems may arise in small communities where information about other religious groups and the number of non-Catholics is

limited. The Constitution prohibits state support for private schools; however, the law provides tax breaks for parents with dependents in private schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period; however, some Muslim groups reported being unable to construct mosques for worship.

On April 24, 2009, a group of moderate Muslims, including Member of Parliament Souad Sbai, along with the leader of the Northern League, Mario Borghezio, demonstrated against the establishment of a new mosque in Turin, funded by the Moroccan government, and the designation of a Moroccan imam who did not speak Italian. They requested the democratic election of another imam by followers of all nationalities. The protest followed an announcement by the leader of the Union of Muslims in Italy, Abdel Azziz Khounati, of the purchase of property to build a mosque and cultural center.

In August 2008 the mayor of Bologna, Sergio Cofferati, suspended plans for the construction of a new mosque on the grounds that the promoters did not satisfy construction requirements. In particular, they were unable to create a foundation responsible for its activities independent from the Union of Islamic Communities in Italy (UCOII), a network of mosques and Muslim communities allegedly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Some UCOII members denied any formal affiliation. In July 2008 Genoa mayor Marta Vincenzi imposed the exclusion of UCOII as a prerequisite to authorize the construction of a new mosque.

The continuing presence of Catholic symbols, such as crucifixes, in courtrooms, schools, and other public buildings continued to draw criticism and led to a number of lawsuits.

On February 17, 2009, the Cassation Court acquitted a judge who had been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and barred from holding public office for a year by the Appeal Court of L'Aquila for refusing to preside in a courtroom where a crucifix was displayed; he accused the Minister of Justice of religious prejudice for not allowing the display of a menorah. Also in February, the Ministry of Education suspended for a month a teacher who removed the crucifix from a classroom in Perugia.

On August 25, 2008, a woman wearing a niqāb, a veil that covers the face, was refused entrance to a museum in Venice. The director of the museum later apologized and said a guard had erred in barring her.

On August 18, 2008, police arrested Abdelmajid Zergout, the imam of a mosque in Varese, at the request of Moroccan authorities, who sought him on charges of "participating in acts of terrorism," including suicide bombings in Casablanca in 2003.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On March 3, 2009, the city of Florence created a Permanent Council for Dialogue with Religious Confessions to promote cooperation between religious groups and public institutions and facilitate the construction of new places of worship.

Also in March 2009, the Government announced a boycott of the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban. Foreign Minister Franco Frattini condemned the preparatory document that included criticism of Israeli foreign policy and anti-Semitic comments regarding the Holocaust.

National, regional, and local authorities organized annual educational initiatives and other events to support National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, 2009, such as the ceremonies hosted by the President and the President of the Chamber of Deputies.

In December 2008 the city of Milan approved a new plan for the enlargement of the Islamic Center.

In October 2008 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced the construction of its first temple in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

There were no reports of violent anti-Semitic attacks in the period covered by this report, but public opinion surveys indicated that anti-Semitism was growing in the country. A survey conducted by the Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation in 2009 found that 44 percent of citizens had an anti-Jewish prejudice. Some believed that "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Italy" and that "Jews exercise excessive economic influence." Twelve percent maintained that "Jews behave like Nazis with the Palestinians."

On January 23, 2009, in Rome, 22 shops owned by Jews were the target of vandalism by the fascist group Militia, which left a banner urging a boycott of Jewish shops. In November 2008 police arrested an activist of the same group who on the 65th anniversary of the fascist raid in the Jewish Ghetto of Rome displayed banners bearing anti-Semitic slogans, including denial of the Holocaust.

On January 4, 2009, during the Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip, 3,000 Muslims organized a prayer near the Cathedral of Milan and demonstrated in favor of Palestinians. The crowd shouted slogans against "the terrorist state of Israel," and a small group burned Israeli and American flags. Politicians, government officials, and the majority of members of the Islamic Council firmly condemned the anti-Semitic episodes. Leaders of Milan's Muslim communities later met with the Catholic archbishop and apologized for the incident.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy carried out a program of Muslim outreach, including meetings with local Muslim communities and cultural music events. Many of these events brought together native-born citizens and Muslims, often immigrants, to build cross-cultural understanding as well as religious and ethnic tolerance.

The Embassy continued to reach out to second-generation Muslim immigrants through student leadership programs, including the Voluntary Visitor program and International Visitor Programs for young Muslim leaders. The Embassy also

implemented a cooperative television program on Muslim integration in the United States and Italy, training on interfaith dialogue techniques in conjunction with U.S.-based Interfaith Youth Core, and a workshop entitled "Blogging as a Minority." Embassy officials continued to meet with local Muslim communities and participate in Muslim community-focused cultural events, such as a special program with the Chargé d'Affaires and U.S. author Walter Russel Mead to discuss U.S. President Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech with Muslim representatives in Rome and Milan.

The Embassy also maintained contact with other religious groups and monitored discrimination.

JAMAICA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,244 square miles and a population of 2.7 million. According to the most recent census (2001), religious affiliation is: Church of God, 24 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; Pentecostal, 10 percent; Baptist, 7 percent; Anglican, 4 percent; Roman Catholic, 2 percent; United Church, 2 percent; Methodist, 2 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; Moravian, 1 percent; Brethren, 1 percent; unstated, 3 percent; and "other," 10 percent. The category "other" includes 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Baha'is. The census reported that 21 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no state religion.

The Government observes Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

Parliament may act to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions, nor do they receive special treatment from the Government. Most religious schools are affiliated with either the Catholic Church or Protestant denominations; there also is at least one Jewish school.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly targeted them; however, it was not clear whether such complaints reflected discrimination on the basis of religious belief or were due to the group's illegal use of marijuana as part of Rastafarian religious practice.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Local media outlets continued to provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on religious matters.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

JAPAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 145,884 square miles and a population of 127.6 million. Since the Government does not require religious groups to report their membership, it is difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents of different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2006 that membership claims by religious groups totaled 209 million persons. This number, which is nearly twice the country's population, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is very common for Japanese to practice both Buddhist and Shinto rites.

According to the Agency's annual yearbook, 107 million persons identify themselves as Shinto, 89 million as Buddhist, 3 million as Christian, and 10 million follow "other" religions, including Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. There are an estimated 100,000 Muslims in Japan, of whom an estimated 10 percent are Japanese citizens. The Israeli Embassy estimates that there are approximately 2,000 Jews, most of them foreign-born. Although anti-Semitic remarks and/or conspiracy theories sometime appear in the media, there are no reports of harassment or violence against either individuals or the Jewish community.

As of December 2006, under the 1951 Religious Juridical Persons Law, the Government recognized 154 schools of Buddhism. The six major schools of Buddhism are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzai sects), Nichiren, and

Narabukkyo. In addition, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, including Soka Gakkai, which reported a membership of 8 million "households." The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjahoncho and Kyohashinto. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have modest followings.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

As noted, the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

As of December 2006, 182,468 out of 223,970 religious groups were certified by the Government as religious organizations with corporate status, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The Government does not require religious groups to register or apply for certification; however, certified religious organizations receive tax benefits. More than 81 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2006.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Juridical Persons Law was amended to provide the Government with the authority to supervise certified religious groups. The amended law requires certified religious organizations to disclose their assets to the Government and empowers the Government to investigate possible violations of regulations governing for-profit activities. Authorities have the right to suspend a religious organization's for-profit activities if they violate these regulations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country. A Jewish American who was detained in a Chiba Prefecture prison at the end of the reporting period had trouble obtaining kosher meals. A local Jewish organization offered to provide the meals to the prison, but prison officials claimed they could not accept food prepared by outside groups.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Unification Church reports that on February 10, 2008 an adult member of the Church who had been held against his will by his family members for over 12 years was released and went to Unification Church headquarters. The Unification Church alleges no one has yet been charged and an investigation has not been conducted as of the end of the reporting period.

In November 2008, a Roman Catholic service in Nagasaki beatifying 188 seventeenth-century Japanese martyrs was well attended by leaders of several religious groups and received positive coverage in the mainstream press.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

JORDAN

The Constitution stipulates that the state religion is Islam but provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. The Constitution also stipulates that there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion. The Government's application of Shari'a (Islamic law), however, infringes upon the religious rights and freedoms laid out in the Constitution by prohibiting conversion from Islam and discriminating against religious minorities in some matters relating to family law, including inheritance practices. Members of unrecognized religious groups also face legal discrimination.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government was unchanged during the reporting period. The Government continued to play a prominent role in promoting interfaith dialogue and harmony, including by hosting a visit by Pope Benedict XVI for a full program that included a meeting with King Abdullah. However, the Government continued to harass some citizens suspected of proselytizing Muslims and a few converts to Christianity, including by attempting to induce them to revert to Islam. The Shari'a court, which has family law jurisdiction for Muslims, continued proceedings against a convert from Islam. Converts from Islam risk the loss of civil rights.

Relations between Muslims and Christians generally were good, and prominent societal leaders and members of the royal family continued to take steps to promote religious freedom. Adherents of unrecognized religions and Muslims who convert to other religions face societal discrimination and the threat of mental and physical abuse.

The Ambassador and other U.S. government officials discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of active, ongoing efforts to promote human rights. In addition, the Embassy supported a number of exchange and outreach programs that facilitate religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 35,637 square miles and a population of 6.3 million. More than 92 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Official and unofficial estimates of the number of Christian citizens vary from 1.5 to 5 percent of the

population. According to church leaders there are an estimated 150,000 Christians. According to representatives of the respective communities, there are a small number of Shi'a Muslims, approximately 1,000 Baha'is, and an estimated 14,000 Druze. There are no statistics available regarding the number of persons who are not adherents of any religious faith.

Officially recognized Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Presbyterian churches. Christian churches not officially recognized but registered as "societies" include the Baptist Church, Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Unrecognized Christian denominations include United Pentecostal and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Shi'a among the Iraqi refugee population, referred to as "guests" by the Government.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) generally agree that the number of Iraqis living in Jordan is 100,000 to 200,000. As of March 30, 2009, approximately 54,000 Iraqis residing in the country were registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as refugees or asylum seekers. Of those registered with the UNHCR, 45 percent are Sunni Muslim, 35 percent Shi'a Muslim, and 12 percent Christian.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of religious minorities. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, also have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a sizeable Druze community. There also are Druze populations in Amman and Zarqa. There are a number of non-indigenous Shi'a living in the Jordan Valley and in the south.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, in Article 14, provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. Article 6 stipulates that there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of

religion. According to the Constitution, the state religion is Islam and the King must be Muslim.

The Constitution, in articles 103-106, also provides that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are under the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts, which apply Shari'a in their proceedings. Personal status issues include religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Personal status law follows the guidelines of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is applied in cases that are not explicitly addressed by civil status legislation. Matters of personal status of non-Muslims whose religion is recognized by the Government are under the jurisdiction of Tribunals of Religious Communities, as outlined in articles 108 and 109.

Neither the Constitution, the penal code, nor legislation ban conversion from Islam or efforts to proselytize Muslims. However, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam in that it accords primacy to Shari'a, which prohibits Muslims from converting and governs their personal status, despite the Constitution's religious freedom provisions and the country's ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Government freely allows conversion to Islam.

The Government does not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws in matters of personal status; converts are still considered Muslims. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and may be denied their civil rights if any member of society files an apostasy complaint against the convert. In cases decided by a Shari'a court, judges have annulled the convert's marriage, transferred child custody, conveyed property rights to Muslim family members, deprived them of civil rights, and declared them wards of the state and without any religious identity.

Shari'a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father. All citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance. Minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam are considered Muslims. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not also convert to Islam.

In June 2006 the Government published the ICCPR, which the country had ratified without reservations in 1976, in the Official Gazette. International covenants published in the Official Gazette possess the force of law but, according to the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are subservient to the Constitution if discrepancies exist. Article 18 of the ICCPR states that everyone shall have the "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," including freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching." Additionally, the ICCPR stipulates that no one shall be subject to coercion that would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. However, articles 103-106 of the Constitution provide that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims, including religion, are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts, which have always ruled to deny Muslims the freedom to adopt a different religion or belief.

The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations must be approved by the Prime Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. Members of Protestant denominations registered as "societies" must use one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions such as the Baha'i Faith. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. Members of religious groups that have no legally recognized court system sometimes convert to another Christian denomination or to Islam in order to divorce legally.

On January 21, 2009, the cabinet officially made the Council of Church Leaders, comprising the heads of the 11 officially recognized Christian denominations in the country, the Government's reference point for all Christian affairs. The Council serves as administrative body to facilitate official business, including the issuance of work permits, land permits, and marriage and birth certificates, with government ministries, departments, and institutions. Unrecognized Christian denominations, despite not having full membership on the Council, must also conduct business with the Government through the Council. As of the end of the reporting period, this new structure was reportedly functioning adequately for both members and non-members of the Council, although concerns exist over the Council's human resources capacity to effectively manage all Christian affairs.

The publication of media items that slander or insult religion is prohibited under Article 38 of the Press and Publications Law, which imposes a fine of up to \$28,000 (20,000 dinars) as stipulated in Article 46.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's Ascension, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, Christmas, and the Gregorian calendar New Year. Christians are traditionally given leave on Christian holidays approved by the Council of Church Leaders, such as Palm Sunday and Easter.

Employment applications for government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion. Religious affiliation is required on national identification cards and legal documentation, including on marriage and birth certificates, but not on travel documents, such as passports.

Christians serve regularly as cabinet ministers. Of the 110 seats of the Lower House of Parliament, nine are reserved for Christians. In November 2007 the King appointed four Christians to serve in the Upper House. No seats are reserved for adherents of other religious groups. The number of Druze is too small to warrant a seat, but they are permitted to hold office under their government classification as Muslims.

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians (4 percent); however, all senior command positions are held by Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer on certain occasions. According to the Foreign Ministry, Christians are dispersed throughout the armed forces. There are only Sunni Muslim chaplains in the armed forces; however, Christian and Shi'a Muslim members of the military are not prohibited from practicing their religion.

While Christianity is a recognized religion and Christians, both local and foreign, may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures in order to own land and administer sacraments, including marriage. Churches and other religious institutions can seek official recognition by applying to the Prime Minister's office.

The Prime Minister confers with the Council of Church Leaders on the registration and recommendation of new churches. The Government also refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of Christian churches: the faith must not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the Middle East Council of Churches must recognize it; the faith must not oppose the national religion; and the group must include some citizens of the country.

There were no reports of banned religious groups.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts (Awqaf) manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government monitors sermons at mosques and requires that preachers refrain from political commentary that could instigate social or political unrest.

Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent of the Government and are tax-exempt. However, the Government revoked the tax-exempt status of the Jordanian Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), which it does not allow to accept Muslim students, in 2006. The Free Evangelical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assemblies of God, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance are registered with the Ministry of Justice as "societies" but not as churches. Churches registered with the Ministry of Justice, however, are not subject to restrictions contained in the 2008 Law on Associations (Law Number 51). The Baptist Church is registered as a "denomination" with the Ministry of Interior.

Although the Government does not recognize the Druze religion and the Baha'i Faith, it does not prohibit their practice. The Druze did not complain of official or societal discrimination. On national identity cards, or "family books," which normally identify the bearer's religious community, the Government records Druze as Muslims. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq; four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies."

Baha'is face similar official discrimination. On national identity cards, the Government either records Baha'is as Muslims, leaves the space blank, or marks it with dashes. The Baha'i community does not have its own court to adjudicate personal status matters. Such cases may be heard in Shari'a courts. The Department of Civil Status and Passports (DCSP) does not recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, but it does issue passports on the basis of these marriages. Additionally, if one Baha'i parent is registered inaccurately as a Muslim, or if a parent or grandparent converted from Islam to the Baha'i Faith, they are unable to obtain birth certificates for their children as they are considered illegitimate. This problem is compounded by the DCSP not officially recognizing Baha'i marriages. The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship. There are two recognized Baha'i cemeteries, but the cemetery

in Adasieh is registered in the name of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, despite requests to register it under the Baha'i Faith.

Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for purposes of official identification.

The Government recognizes Judaism as a religion; however, there are reportedly no Jewish citizens. The Government does not impose restrictions on Jews, and they are permitted to own property and conduct business in the country.

Public schools provide mandatory religious instruction for all Muslim students. Christian students are allowed to leave the classroom during these sessions. Christian students in private and public schools must learn verses from the Qur'an and Islamic poetry in both Arabic and social studies classes in preparation for mid-year and end-of-year exams. The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own communities "provided that they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to government control in matters relating to their curriculums and orientation." Several Christian denominations operate private schools in several cities that are open to adherents of all religions, such as the Baptist, Orthodox, and Latin schools.

The Ministry of Tourism has oversight over the preservation of holy sites and encourages tourism to the four main historic Christian and many Islamic religious sites in the Kingdom, including the Shi'a pilgrimage site near Karak. There were no reports of misuse or neglect of these sites, nor of harassment, discrimination, or restrictions in their use.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited, but some government actions impeded the activities of some Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have been accorded legal recognition.

Iraqi Christian churches reported no restrictions on the practice of their faith. During the reporting period, a group of Iraqi Sunni scholars stated that they were no longer pursuing government permission to establish a religious institute and training center. They reportedly received no response to their May 2007 request for approval.

JETS, a Christian training school for pastors and other Christian leaders licensed by the Government in 1995, operates as an educational institution under the Ministry of Culture, but was denied accreditation in 2004. Because JETS is not accredited, its students are not eligible for student visas but may enter the country on tourist visas of limited duration. JETS programs are multiyear and consequently many students overstay their visas. Upon departure from the country they and any family members who may have accompanied them are required to pay \$2 (1.5 dinars) for each day they spent without a visa (as are other visiting foreign nationals). However, the Government did issue visas and residency permits to JETS visiting professors during the reporting period.

The Department of Civil Status and Passports practice of not officially recognizing marriages conducted by Baha'i Assemblies continued to hinder the issuance of birth certificates to some Baha'i children. Children must have birth certificates to register for school. In one case, the Department changed the religion on the identification card of a female Baha'i, who is married to a Baha'i man, to Islam. Since government policy, following Shari'a, forbids a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, her husband would have to convert to Islam in order for them to obtain a legally recognized marriage certificate. Because the couple did not have one, the Department continued to refuse the issuance of a birth certificate to their child unless the father's name was omitted from the certificate, making the child illegitimate.

On October 19, 2008, authorities arrested poet and *Al Arab Al Yawm* reporter Islam Samhan and charged him with slandering Islam for incorporating verses of the Qur'an and prophets in his book of poetry. Two weeks prior to Samhan's arrest, the Grand Mufti, the country's senior religious leader, issued a fatwa calling him an "infidel" and an "apostate," and described the use of Qur'anic verses as an act of blasphemy. Samhan was charged with violating two articles of the Press and Publications Law, including Article 38, which prohibits the publication of media items that slander or insult religion. On October 24, 2008, authorities released Samhan on \$1,400 (1,000 dinars) bail. On June 21, 2009, the court sentenced Samhan to one year's imprisonment and fined him \$14,000 (10,000 dinars) on charges of slandering Islam and insulting "religious sentiment." At the end of the reporting period, Samhan was still on bail pending an appeal of the Court of First Instance's ruling.

Churchgoers reported the presence of security officers in civilian clothes outside churches of some Christian denominations on several occasions during the

reporting period. Security officials reportedly did not state a reason for their presence. A few religious leaders also reported being summoned by the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) for questioning on their church's activities and church membership.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, a few converts from Islam to Christianity reported being summoned and questioned by GID officers after family members complained to authorities about the conversion. GID personnel reportedly questioned their beliefs, threatened court and other actions, and offered rewards for denouncing the conversion, such as employment opportunities. These converts also reported that GID personnel withheld certificates of good behavior required for job applications, or to open a business, and told employers to fire them. Other converts reported receiving no harassment by authorities and, in at least one instance, officials positively intervened to mediate a dispute between a convert and family members.

On June 22, 2009, newspapers cited conflicting reports about a hunger strike staged by Islamic fundamentalist prisoners at the Swaqa Correctional Facility to protest mistreatment and solitary confinement. Police stated that the prisoners only threatened to strike but later changed their minds. On February 9, 2009, families of Islamic fundamentalist prisoners in the Swaqa and Jweideh prisons reported to Al Jazeera TV the occurrence of daily beatings and torture. Several local human rights organizations found no evidence that such beatings or other harsh treatment occurred. Rather, they found that the torture allegations were made in an attempt to stop their scheduled transfer to another ward in implementation of a prison reform program that reassigns inmates to living quarters on the basis of prisoner classification, primarily according to the type of crime they committed. The police agreed with this assessment. International and local non-governmental organizations, however, have reported that Islamic fundamentalist prisoners sometimes face harsher prison conditions than other inmates.

On March 22, 2009, an apostasy case brought to the Amman Shari'a Court by the brother of a citizen who converted from Islam to the Baha'i Faith resumed after being postponed in May 2008. The case was postponed on three separate occasions in April 2009 because both the convert and the witnesses failed to appear. The judge ordered the brother to return to the court with an address for the convert and the nearest police station in order to proceed further. The case was

initiated in March 2007. The 56-year-old defendant converted when he was 19, so there appears to be no statute of limitations.

On April 22, 2008, the Sweilih Shari'a Court found Muhammad Abbad Abbad, a convert from Islam to Christianity, guilty of apostasy, annulled his marriage, and declared him to be without any religious identity. In March 2008, Abbad was reportedly taken to Sweilih Shari'a Court without legal representation on charges of apostasy. Accused of "contempt of court" and sentenced to one week's imprisonment, Abbad and his family departed the country for fear of losing their civil rights and custody of the children. The Government issued arrest warrants after their departure. At the end of the reporting period, the family remained outside the country.

In early 2008 and late 2007, approximately 30 expatriate members of evangelical churches, many of whom were long-time residents of the country, were either deported, refused renewal of residency permits, or denied re-entry after exiting the country. The Government cited concern for the evangelicals' personal safety, violation of immigration regulations, and actions while in the country that violated unspecified laws as the reasons for these decisions. Some of the evangelicals were questioned and detained without charge by GID officials before their deportation. The Government permitted four of the evangelicals to return to the country.

Following a Western media report criticizing the Government for religious freedom violations that included the expulsion of missionaries, the Council of Church Leaders issued a response in February 2008. The Council's declaration supported the Government's decision to deport or deny residency permits to approximately 30 foreign evangelical Christians. It also accused 40 unofficial missionary "sects," which were widely understood to implicitly include local evangelical churches, of fomenting sectarian strife with Muslims and threatening public security. Local daily newspapers reported on the declaration and published numerous articles and editorials critical of evangelical activities, including accusations of conducting illegal missionary work. Local evangelical church leaders attempted to publish a response to the letter but were allegedly denied permission by the dailies' editors-in-chief, although one response was found on the *Ammoun* news website (<http://ammonnews.net>). Parliament issued a statement endorsing the declaration, and it briefly appeared on the website of the Jordanian Embassy in Washington, DC.

In April 2007 authorities deported Pastor Mazhar Izzat Bishay of the Aqaba Free Evangelical Church, an Egyptian national and 28-year resident married to a

Jordanian, to Egypt. It was reported that they had previously interrogated him and offered no reason for the deportation.

In late 2006 authorities deported Wajeeh Besharah, Ibrahim Atta, Raja Welson, and Imad Waheeb, four Coptic Egyptians living in Aqaba, to Egypt. It was reported that the authorities questioned them about their affiliation with the Free Evangelical Church in Aqaba prior to their deportation.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

From May 8-11, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI visited the country, during which time he met with King Abdullah, Muslim and Christian leaders, presidents of Jordanian universities, and the diplomatic corps, with a goal of strengthening the historically close ties between the country's Muslim and Christian communities and facilitating an expansion of interfaith dialogue and understanding. The Pope also conducted mass, blessed the foundation stone of a new university, and visited religious sites, including the Al Hussein bin Talal Mosque, Mount Nebo, and the site where Jesus is believed to have been baptized.

In May 2009, following the Pope's visit, the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, under the patronage of Prince El Hassan Bin Talal and in partnership with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, hosted a colloquium entitled "Religion and Civil Society." The colloquium explored the relationship between religion and civil society in Christianity and Islam.

On March 20, 2009, an Evangelical Baptism Center was dedicated and opened at Bethany-Beyond-Jordan. The ceremony was attended by Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey, and local religious leaders. The Baptism Center is one of several new churches being constructed along the Jordan River by Christian denominations to commemorate the site where Jesus is believed to have been baptized.

In November 2008 the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue sponsored the first Catholic-Muslim Forum. The forum, held in the Vatican, brought together approximately 50 scholars from both religions to discuss shared values and common beliefs. The scholars concluded the forum by signing a declaration calling for religious freedom, stating "Genuine love of neighbor implies respect of the person and her or his choices in matters of conscience and religion." This formulation appeared to build on the historic October 2007 open letter, entitled "A Common Word Between Us and You," that was finalized at a conference hosted by the Institute under the patronage of King Abdullah. The open letter, signed by 138 Muslim leaders, clerics, and scholars, addressed Christians worldwide, calling for interfaith dialogue to be based henceforth on love of God and neighbor. The November 2008 declaration also called for protection of minorities, respect for religious symbols, and equal rights. This forum followed an October 2008 interfaith conference co-organized with the Bishop of Canterbury and July 2008 conference organized with Yale University.

In August 2008 the Middle East Church Council organized a regional workshop in Amman on human rights and religious coexistence entitled "Making Use of East-West Dialogue to Build a Culture of Peace." During the four-day workshop, Jordanian delegates, and delegates from elsewhere in the Middle East, the United States, and Canada, discussed the role of youth groups in promoting human rights and coexistence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some religious groups, such as the Baha'is, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced societal discrimination. Some Muslims who converted to other religions reported facing social ostracism, threats, and physical and verbal abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. In recent years, some family members of converts have filed apostasy charges against them in Shari'a courts, which have led to convictions depriving them of civil rights, including annulment of their marriage contracts and loss of custody of their children. Citizens reported that interfaith romantic relationships have led to ostracism and, in some cases, feuds between members of the couple's families.

Anti-Semitism was present in the media, and editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces sometimes depicted negative images of Jews without government response.

In June and July 2008, the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center hosted students from Harvard University taking part in an interfaith program to meet with political and religious leaders. As part of the program, 22 American students from the Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths attended a camp with 35 Christian and Muslim Jordanian students. The program marked the first time that such a diverse group of students from both countries assembled to share their experiences and religions and promoted religious freedom through the practice of basic rules of respecting one another and their religious beliefs. The Jordanian students learned about religious diversity in the United States and the American students about society and traditions in the Middle East.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government promotes religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other embassy officials raised religious freedom issues with government authorities on many occasions via formal inquiry and discussion with both working-level contacts and high-ranking officials. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities, as well as with private religious organizations and interfaith institutions.

The U.S. Department of State continued its multiphase exchange program to send national religious scholars, teachers, and leaders to the United States to promote tolerance and a better understanding of religious freedom as a fundamental human right and source of stability.

In August 2008 eight female teachers, professors, and academics participated in an International Visitor Leadership Program on "The Role of Religion in the U.S." This program was designed to introduce participants to the intersection of government and religion and the level of freedom and tolerance enjoyed by all religious groups in the United States. Participants also learned about religion, faith, and spirituality in American society and politics and the role of non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and religious institutions in promoting religious freedom and civil rights. Upon return, participants incorporated experiences into classroom teaching materials.

From June 20 to August 3, 2008, the U.S. Government sponsored an assistant professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Jordan to participate in the 2009 Summer Institute on Religious Pluralism, hosted by the University of California Santa Barbara. The program, which included a study tour, focused on religion and

social policy in the United States, church-state relations, dynamics of religious pluralism, and the history, sociology, and demographics of American religion.

During the reporting period the U.S. Embassy hosted two digital video conferences (DVCs) that promoted religious freedom and tolerance. On December 15, 2008, the Embassy organized a DVC at the University of Jordan's American Corner with Mohammad Abu Nimer, author of "Non-violence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice." Attendees discussed the difference between applying Islam in the United States versus in the Arab world and political and socio-cultural obstacles and opportunities to applying Islamic non-violence and peace-building methods. Students used three case studies during the DVC to learn how religious values can be effectively applied to the benefit of the greater community.

On April 1, 2009, the Embassy, in collaboration with the quasi-governmental Jordanian National Commission for Women, hosted a DVC with Dr. Mervat Hatem, Professor of Political Science at Howard University, entitled, "Feminism: Secular, Islamic and State." Forty women from a wide range of NGOs, societies, universities, and other organizations attended the DVC, which provided an opportunity to discuss the human and legal rights for women in Islam and ways to further promote women's rights in the context of the state and religion.

KAZAKHSTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, but the Government's religion laws narrow the legal protections of religious freedom in the Constitution.

The status of government respect for religious freedom held steady during the reporting period. In comparison to the previous reporting period, the Government's criticism of "nontraditional religious groups" decreased. There was no change in the laws governing religious activity. During the reporting period, the Constitutional Council ruled unconstitutional proposed legislation that would have restricted religious freedom. The Government's enforcement of current laws led to continuing problems for some unregistered groups, as the law imposes mandatory registration requirements on missionaries and religious organizations. While the majority of religious communities worshipped largely without government interference, local officials attempted on occasion to limit some minority groups' practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Jewish leaders reported high levels of acceptance in society. Some minority religious groups, including evangelical Christians and Scientologists, faced negative media coverage, especially while the draft religion legislation was under consideration.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials at all levels engaged in extensive private and public dialogue to urge that any amendments to the religion laws be consistent with the country's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and with its international commitments. U.S. government officials visited religious facilities, met with religious leaders, and worked with government officials to address specific cases of concern. Embassy officials maintained contact with a broad range of religious groups and religious freedom advocates.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,052,540 square miles and a population of 16.4 million, according to preliminary results of the 2009 national census. The society is ethnically diverse, and many religious groups are represented. Due in part to the country's nomadic and Soviet past, many residents describe themselves as

nonbelievers; surveys from past years suggested low levels of religious conviction and worship attendance. The Government maintains statistics on the number of registered congregations and organizations but not on the size of each group. The most recent reliable statistics on religious affiliation are based on the 1999 census. Although there was a large increase in the number of minority religious congregations registered since 1999, the Government believes that percentages of the population belonging to particular religious groups have remained consistent.

Approximately 65 percent of the population, or 10.5 million, profess to be Muslim. Ethnic Kazakhs, who constitute an estimated 60 percent of the population, and ethnic Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Tatars, who collectively make less than 10 percent, are historically Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. Other Islamic groups that account for less than 1 percent of the population include Shafi'i Sunni (traditionally associated with Chechens), Shi'a, Sufi, and Ahmadi. The highest concentration of self-identified practicing Muslims is in the southern region bordering Uzbekistan. There were 2,308 registered mosques, most affiliated with the Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), a national organization with close ties to the Government. Approximately 70 mosques are not affiliated with the SAMK.

Approximately one-third of the population, comprising sizeable numbers of ethnic Russians and smaller populations of ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Belarusians, are Russian Orthodox by tradition. There were 265 registered Russian Orthodox churches. Members of a Roman Catholic archdiocese include ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Germans and account for 1 percent of the population. An estimated 1.3 percent is ethnic German, many of whom are Roman Catholic or Lutheran. The Government reported 93 registered Roman Catholic churches and affiliated organizations throughout the country. A smaller, affiliated community of Greek Catholics, many of whom are ethnic Ukrainians, had five registered churches.

According to government statistics, Protestant Christian congregations outnumber Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholic congregations, although it is unlikely that Protestant Christians account for a larger number of adherents. The Government reported 1,018 registered Protestant Christian organizations with 543 places of worship during the reporting period.

There are two Baptist groups in the country: the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (Union of Baptists), with an estimated 10,000 adherents and 227 registered groups, and the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and

Baptists (Council of Churches) with as many as 1,000 adherents. The Council of Churches refused on principle to register.

Other Christian religious groups with a sizable number of congregations include Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Pentecostals, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. Smaller communities of Methodists, Mennonites, and Mormons are also registered.

A Jewish community, estimated at less than 1 percent of the population, has synagogues in Almaty, Astana, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kostanai, and Pavlodar.

Government statistics included 43 other registered religious groups during the reporting period, including five registered Buddhist groups, 12 affiliates of the Hare Krishna movement, as well as the Church of Scientology, Baha'is, Christian Scientists, and the Unification Church.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. It defines the country as a secular state and provides the right to decline religious affiliation.

The Government's religion laws narrow the legal protections of religious freedom found in the Constitution, and 2005 amendments to the laws reinforce registration requirements. They also clarify that religious groups must register with both the central Government and local governments of individual regions (oblasts) in which they have congregations. To register, a religious organization must have at least 10 members and submit an application to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Religion legislation continues to provide that all persons are free to practice their religion "alone or together with others."

The Government may deny registration based upon an insufficient number of adherents or inconsistencies between the provisions of a religious organization's charter and the law. In addition, under the Law on Public Associations, a registered organization, including a religious group, may have all activities suspended by court order for a period of three to six months for defiance of the Constitution or laws or for systematic pursuit of activities that contradict the charter and bylaws of the organization as registered. Police, procurators, and citizens may petition a court to suspend the activities of a registered organization

for failure to rectify violations or for repeated violations of the law. During a suspension, the organization is prohibited from speaking with the media on behalf of the organization; holding meetings, gatherings, or services; and undertaking financial transactions other than ongoing contractual obligations such as paying salaries.

Administrative Code Article 375 allows authorities to suspend the activities and fine the leaders of unregistered groups; Article 374-1, a related provision added to the Administrative Code by the July 2005 national security amendments, carries significantly heavier fines than article 375. Running an unregistered religious organization is subject to a fine of \$973 (116, 800 tenge) and participating in an unregistered religious organization is subject to a fine of \$487 (58,400 tenge). Local authorities have broad discretion in determining whether to file charges for unregistered religious activity under articles 375 or 374-1.

The Religious Issues Committee (RIC), which operates within the MOJ, serves as a liaison between religious groups and the Government. In addition, the RIC serves as a consultative body within the MOJ to facilitate the registration of religious groups. The RIC also provides expert testimony to courts on religious issues, reviews religious materials law enforcement officials obtain in their investigations, and coordinates with law enforcement officials to monitor compliance with registration requirements.

During the reporting period, government officials continued to express concern regarding the potential spread of political and religious extremism in the country. The Committee for National Security (KNB) has characterized the fight against "religious extremism" as a top priority of the internal intelligence service. A 2005 extremism law, which applies to religious groups and other organizations, gives the Government broad latitude in identifying and designating a group as an extremist organization, banning a designated group's activities, and criminalizing membership in a banned organization. The Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) political movement remained the only group banned under the law. HT is an extremist Islamist political organization motivated by a socioreligious ideology that is virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western and calls for the overthrow of secular governments. No apolitical religious organizations in the country have been outlawed as extremist.

The Government observes Orthodox Christmas and Kurban-Ait as national holidays.

The elections law prohibits political parties based upon ethnicity, gender, or religious affiliation. The Criminal Code prohibits the incitement of interethnic or interreligious hatred; this law has on one occasion been subject to broad interpretation that included religious teachings.

The SAMK, headed by the chief mufti in Almaty, exercises significant influence over the practice of Islam, including the construction of mosques and the administration of examinations and background checks for aspiring imams. The SAMK is the primary coordinator of Hajj travel and authorizes travel agencies to provide Hajj travel services to citizens. Religious observers report that the SAMK occasionally pressures nonaligned imams and congregations to join the SAMK to ensure liturgical orthodoxy. Notwithstanding SAMK influence and pressure, there were some registered Muslim communities unaffiliated with the SAMK.

Local and foreign missionaries must register annually with the MOJ and provide information on religious affiliation, territory of missionary work, and time period for conducting that work. All literature and other materials to support missionary work must be provided with the registration application; use of materials not vetted during the registration process is illegal. In addition, a missionary must produce registration documents and power of attorney from the sponsoring religious organization to be allowed to work on its behalf. The MOJ may refuse registration to missionaries whose work would be inconsistent with any law, including laws prohibiting the incitement of interethnic or interreligious hatred. Foreign missionaries, like all visitors, are required to register with the migration police and indicate the purpose of their stay. The Constitution requires foreign religious associations to conduct their activities, including appointing the heads of religious associations, "in coordination with appropriate state institutions." Foreigners may register religious organizations; however, the Government requires that the majority of the 10 founders be local citizens.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Homeschooling is permitted only in certain circumstances, which do not include religiously based motivations. Parents may enroll children in supplemental religious education classes provided by registered religious organizations.

Under the national religion law, religious training of a child shall not cause damage to a child's all-around development or physical or moral health. The laws do not clarify how such damage should be assessed or which agency would make such a determination. Educational licensing regulations do not permit religious groups to educate children without approval from the Ministry of Education. In accordance

with the regulations, a religious organization whose charter includes provisions for religious education may be denied registration if it does not obtain approval from the Ministry of Education.

The Government exempts registered religious organizations from taxes on church collections and income from certain religious activities. Congregations are required to pay for services such as fire company protection for religious buildings. The Government has donated buildings and land and provided other assistance for the construction of new mosques, synagogues, and Russian Orthodox churches.

Procurators have the right to inspect annually all organizations registered with state bodies, and they regularly conducted such inspections.

On November 26, 2008, Parliament passed amendments to the religion law that civil society activists and religious groups widely opposed as severe restrictions of religious freedom. The effects of the amendments include establishing more restrictive procedures for registering religious organizations; requiring all existing religious organizations to reregister; prohibiting smaller groups from preaching or teaching outside the group, producing religious literature, or maintaining worship facilities open to the public; and requiring local government authorization for the construction of a religious facility. In addition, the amendments would have significantly increased fines and penalties for violating the law. The proposed legislation was sent for signature to the President, who submitted it to the Constitutional Council for review. On February 11, 2009, the Council struck down the legislation, ruling on technical grounds that the amendments were unconstitutional.

The 2007-09 Program for Ensuring Religious Freedom and Improvement of Relations between the Government and Religions, approved by the Government in December 2007, provides a set of guidelines and plans for the Government's activities in the sphere of religion. Among other things, the program outlines plans for "increasing the stability of the religious situation" and preventing religious extremism through a variety of educational efforts and government-sponsored articles and programs in media outlets. In addition, the program criticizes increasingly active "nontraditional religious groups" for causing tension in interfaith relations and ignoring existing social, cultural, and religious traditions. The program calls for new legislation to increase control over missionaries and over the dissemination of religious materials.

On April 14, 2009, the President's Human Rights Commission (HRC), an advisory body, presented the country's first National Action Plan on Human Rights for 2009-12. One of the HRC's recommendations was that the MOJ, in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), begin publishing annual reports on the status of religious freedom in the country. It also proposed that by 2011, the country should amend its religious legislation to bring it in line with international standards. The President signed the Action Plan in June 2009.

The Government continued to express publicly its support for religious tolerance and diversity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

No apolitical religious groups are banned.

The Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) Islamist political movement remained banned under the extremism law. Because HT is primarily a political organization, albeit motivated by religious ideology, and because it does not condemn terrorist acts by other groups, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute its members are not a restriction on religious freedom per se.

Most religious communities choose to register with the Government and are ultimately successful in obtaining registration; however, minority religious groups sometimes reported long delays. When it refused or significantly delayed registration, the Government usually claimed a group's charter did not meet the requirements of the law or cited the need to refer it for expert theological review.

The national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center, registered at the national level in Astana and Almaty, succeeded in registering its local group in Atyrau Oblast. On January 26, 2009, the Atyrau City Court upheld the community's right to registration, overturning seven years of denials by regional MOJ officials and the Akimat (municipal authorities).

The Grace Presbyterian Church affiliate in Atyrau was repeatedly prevented from registering in Atyrau Oblast, with the latest denial in September 2007. According to credible reporting, during this reporting period the church chose to abandon its attempts to register as an independent organization and joined a registered community that follows similar teachings.

The majority of religious groups worshiped largely without government interference; however, local and regional officials attempted on occasion to limit or control several groups' practice of religion, especially minority religious communities such as evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and Muslims not affiliated with the SAMK. The Government applied laws governing unregistered religious groups unevenly during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Council of Churches noted several court cases against churchgoers throughout the country for participating in the activities of an unregistered group. The Baptist Council of Churches has a policy not to seek or accept registration in former Soviet countries, and church members criticized the intrusive nature of the registration process that requires information about ethnicity, family status, religious education, employment, and political affiliation.

The Council reported several instances in which pastors were fined for unregistered religious activities and were subsequently arrested for failure to pay the fines. In all the cases, the terms were either suspended or limited to three days in jail.

In contrast with the previous reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported improved relations with the authorities but noted several cases of government interference with their attempts to conduct ceremonies and other gatherings. In July and August 2008, district courts ordered three chapters of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Southern Kazakhstan to suspend their activities for alleged breaches of the administrative code. In three separate instances, the courts ruled that the chapters broke the law by convening for religious activities outside their registered addresses and ordered them to suspend their activities for six months. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed appeals with the HRC and the Prosecutor General's (PG) Office. The PG supported the Jehovah's Witnesses' appeal and formally protested the court decision, stating that the chapters had not violated the law. On November 20, 2008, the South Kazakhstan Oblast Court repealed the decision of the lower courts, allowing the Jehovah's Witnesses chapters to resume their activities.

The Church of Scientology reported several instances of government interference. On May 1, 2009, the head of the Almaty Mission was formerly charged with unlicensed commercial activities. A court date had not been set by the end of the reporting period. On February 16, 2009, the Karaganda Regional Economic Court ordered the Karaganda branch of the Church of Scientology closed, stating that the Church engaged in illegal commercial activities. The court also accepted the procurator's argument that the Church's Scriptures were not religious material and

were potentially harmful. The Church filed an appeal, and the case was pending at the end of the reporting period

According to media reporting, local school authorities and the Akimat in Pavlodar filed a complaint with the Procurator General's Office (PGO) against the parents of a 12-year-old girl who did not attend school on Saturdays. The girl's family is Seventh-day Adventist, and the parents argued to the school that their faith forbade work on Saturdays. The PGO had not responded to the school authorities' request by the end of the reporting period.

There were reports that local representatives of the KNB or police disrupted religious meetings in private homes during the reporting period. Several groups reported that local law enforcement representatives attended their services, although their presence generally was not considered disruptive.

Although the law is vague on the definition of missionary activity, authorities frequently interpreted any religious activity by visiting foreigners as missionary activity and expelled those who were not registered as missionaries.

On January 27, 2009, Almaty Airport Border Security officials denied entry to the leader of the Almaty Hare Krishna Society, a U.S. citizen, and ordered him deported. The deportation order related to an incident in May 2008 in Aktobe, in which the leader had a meeting with followers that the Aktobe police considered unauthorized missionary activity. The Hare Krishna Society leader avoided a summons to appear for police questioning, and Aktobe authorities later initiated an administrative case against him, tried him in absentia, and sentenced him to deportation without the ability to return. In March 2009, following RIC intervention, the PGO rescinded the ban, and the Society's leader was able to reenter the country.

On January 30, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the PGO requesting a formal review of the case against a U.S. citizen, who was a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, and a Canadian citizen, both of whom had been deported in May 2008 after courts ruled that they had violated the terms of their business visas by conducting missionary activities without registration. The PGO had not responded to their request by the end of the reporting period. According to media reports, 17 Baptist missionaries from Uzbekistan and Russia were detained in Southern Kazakhstan and fined or deported for illegal missionary activity.

Where religious groups operated legal entities, such as collective farms, restaurants, or orphanages, authorities conducted health, sanitation, and other inspections relevant to the nature of the entities' operations. Authorities conducted public safety inspections of premises used for religious worship to ensure compliance with building and fire codes. These inspections also provided authorities with information about the registration status of the groups.

During the last six months of 2008, while the amendments to the religion law were under review in Parliament, several media outlets published or broadcast stories critical of nontraditional religious groups such as evangelical Protestant Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and Hare Krishnas, depicting them as dangerous sects harmful to society. The president of the Almaty Law Academy publicly urged law enforcement on December 1, 2008, to "step up the fight" against sects. On December 15, 2008, the national *Liter* newspaper published an article depicting the followers of the Ahmadi Islamic movement as "zombies" and alleging that numerous "sects," such as Scientologists, Wahhabis, and Hare Krishnas, "are destroying people's lives." Several religious freedom advocates maintained that the Government sponsored the negative stories as part of its program to inform the public about the purported dangers of religious extremism and to lay the groundwork for amendments to the religion law. The number of such publications dropped off significantly after the Constitutional Council ruled the religion legislation unconstitutional.

In contrast with the previous reporting period, the Karasai regional government near Almaty moved toward an agreement with the Almaty Hare Krishnas over resolution of a property dispute regarding a plot of land they had been using in the Almaty region. In March 2009 local authorities offered the Krishnas land close to Almaty for their temple and promised to find pasture land for the community's cows. Negotiations were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The Government maintained that the dispute was a property dispute unrelated to the religious affiliation of the Hare Krishnas. Several other Hare Krishna communities registered in the country operated without similar problems, although they did not own any property.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On December 24, 2008, the KNB press office announced that in 2008, 30 Hizb ut Tahrir (HT) members had been arrested and seven of them were sentenced to prison. On April 22, 2009, five more alleged HT members were sentenced to prison for "inflaming social, ethnic, racial, and religious hostility" and for creating

and participating in "illegal public and other unions." The trials were conducted behind closed doors in Almaty and Taldykorgan. No official information on the names of the convicted or the charges against them was released. Human rights advocates protested the closed trials.

As in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of prolonged detention of members of religious organizations for proselytizing. On occasion, authorities took action against individuals engaged in proselytizing who were not registered as missionaries; however, such actions were limited to the confiscation of religious literature, fines, brief detentions, and deportation.

On January 9, 2009, an Almaty district court found Elizaveta Drenicheva, a Unification Church member and Russian citizen, guilty of "instilling a sense of inferiority in citizens based on their tribal association" and sentenced her to two years in jail. The case was based on several religious lectures Drenicheva gave, in which she articulated the Church's teachings on creation, original sin, and resurrection. Authorities arrested Drenicheva on January 9. The procurators argued that by creating a distinction between those who devote themselves to the Church and those who do not, Drenicheva's lectures caused those who do not follow the Church to feel inferior. Human rights activists and international observers sharply criticized the decision as an infringement on freedom of conscience. On March 10, the Almaty Court of Appeals vacated the two-year prison sentence against Drenicheva. It upheld a lower court's ruling that Drenicheva was guilty of "propagating the inferiority of Kazakhstani citizens," but ruled that a jail sentence was too harsh. Drenicheva was instead fined approximately \$8 (1,273 tenge), a fine she did not have to pay because of the time already spent in detention awaiting the appellate ruling.

According to media reports, members of Tablighi Jama'at Muslim movement, an apolitical Islamic missionary group with origins in South Asia, were detained in Atyrau and Zhambyl regions for illegal missionary activities. The Tablighi Jama'at movement is not registered in the country.

On October 8, 2008, officials from the Committee for National Security (KNB) raided the premises of the Church of Scientology's Almaty mission, Medeo mission, and Almaty mission district office, as well as the homes of several of the Church's executives. The officials confiscated computers, personal files, and, at a later point, religious materials and attributes. Authorities claimed the Church had engaged in illegal commercial activities by selling books of religious teachings and had used its status as a religious organization to avoid paying taxes.

During the reporting period, the Government continued to investigate an apparent treason case, involving raids, brief detentions, and a tax evasion trial, against leaders of Grace Presbyterian Church, following an August 27, 2009, KNB raid on the Church's headquarters in the city of Karaganda, a Grace Church in Ust Kamenogorsk, and several church-owned private homes. This followed a January 2008 raid on the Almaty Grace Presbyterian Church, a separate congregation. The Government released few details of the investigation and forbade church officials to discuss the case. Authorities did not formally detain any church officials or close the churches. At the end of the reporting period, no church officials had been charged with treason, although church officials and religious freedom advocates remained alarmed at the breadth and scope of the continuing investigation. In May 2008 a local Karaganda court decided against Arina Kim, the wife of Grace Presbyterian Church leader Igor Kim, and levied a fine for failure to pay taxes on charitable contributions.

There were no further developments following the February 2007 "Operation Religious Extremism" law enforcement sweep by Northern Kazakhstan Oblast authorities that resulted in the arrest, brief detention, prosecution, and fining of eight pastors and church leaders for violating religious registration laws.

When individuals were found guilty of violating articles 374 or 375 of the Administrative Code, courts imposed a fine. Council of Churches members usually refused to pay fines for nonregistration. There were reports that courts enforced payment of fines in several cases by seizing property, including private homes owned by pastors and used for worship.

There were no demolitions of Hare Krishna homes during the reporting period, in contrast to previous reporting, in which the Karasai local government outside Almaty forcibly demolished 25 Hare Krishna homes in November 2006 and June 2007 as part of its campaign to seize title to land used by the Hare Krishna movement.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Constitutional Council ruled in February 2009 that the proposed amendments to the religion law were unconstitutional. In the months preceding this ruling, in response to concerns about the restrictive nature of the legislation, the Government had received expert legal assistance from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and had incorporated some of its suggestions into the text of the legislation.

An additional 107 religious groups registered with the Government during the reporting period. Some groups lost registration status, however. With the Atyrau group's registration, local Jehovah's Witnesses achieved registration in all 14 oblasts.

The Government made efforts to promote religious tolerance in its ranks. Human rights training that NGOs provided to law enforcement officers in cooperation with the Government continued to include information on religious rights under the law.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The country is multiethnic, with a long tradition of tolerance and secularism. Since independence, the number of mosques and churches has increased greatly. However, the population is sometimes wary of minority religious groups and groups that proselytize. There were several reports of citizens filing complaints with authorities after their family members became involved with such groups.

Members of the extremist HT political movement continued to print and distribute leaflets that supported anti-Semitism, among other beliefs.

Leaders of the four religious groups the Government considers "traditional"--Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism--reported general acceptance and tolerance that other minority religious groups did not always enjoy. During the reporting period, there were no reports that mistrust of minority religious groups led to violence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials emphasized that bilateral cooperation on economic and security matters is a complement to, not a substitute for, meaningful progress on human rights, including religious freedom.

The Ambassador and other embassy officers, as well as Department of State officials in Washington, remained engaged in dialogue with the Government to seek assurance that the draft religion law amendments would be considered through a transparent legislative process and that any amendments ultimately adopted into law reflect the country's international commitments to respect individuals' rights to peaceful expression of religious beliefs. The Ambassador and other embassy officials coordinated with other embassies and international human rights organizations to encourage the Government to have the legislation reviewed by the Constitutional Council, which ultimately ruled it to be unconstitutional.

Embassy and other U.S. Department of State officials visited houses of worship, met with religious leaders, and worked with government officials to address specific cases of concern.

The Embassy maintained contact with a broad range of religious communities and religious freedom advocates and reported on violations of their constitutional and human rights. Department of State officials met with government officials and members of faith-based groups in the country. Senior U.S. government officials met with senior government officials to raise religious freedom concerns. Embassy officials worked to connect religious communities with in-country legal resources to assist with registration concerns.

Embassy officials attended public events in support of religious communities and participated in roundtables and other public debates on matters of religious freedom and tolerance. U.S. government representatives in the country and in Washington were in regular contact with NGOs that followed religious freedom topics, including the Almaty Helsinki Committee, the Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan, and the Kazakhstan Bureau of International Human Rights and Rule of Law.

The Embassy's Democracy Commission Small Grants Program provided support to a program in Shymkent promoting religious tolerance.

KENYA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. However, some Muslim leaders continued to charge that the Government is hostile toward Muslims.

While there were very few reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, some Muslims perceived themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in the predominantly Christian country.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 225,000 square miles and a population of 39 million. Approximately 80 percent of the population is Christian, 10 percent Muslim, less than 1 percent Hindu, Sikh, and Baha'i, while the remainder follows various indigenous religions. Protestants comprise 58 percent of Christians, and Roman Catholics 42 percent.

North Eastern Province, where the population is predominantly ethnic Somali, is home to 15 percent of the Muslim population. Sixty percent of the Muslim population lives in eastern Coast Province, making up 50 percent of the total population there. Western areas of Coast Province are mostly Christian. The upper part of Eastern Province is home to 10 percent of the country's Muslims, mostly ethnic Borana but also some Somalis, where they are the majority religious group. Apart from a small ethnic Somali Muslim population in Nairobi, the rest of the country is largely Christian.

Upper Eastern, North Eastern, and Coast Provinces, which together are home to approximately 75 percent of the Muslim population, are less developed than other parts of the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Policy/Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution and the Kadhis' Courts Act of 1967 establish a venue for the adjudication of certain types of civil cases based on Islamic law. The Constitution provides for Kadhis' courts in situations where "all the parties profess the Muslim religion" in suits addressing "questions of Muslim law relating to personal status, marriage, divorce, or inheritance." However, the secular High Court has jurisdiction over civil or criminal proceedings, including those in the Kadhis' courts; any decision can be directly appealed to the High Court.

Some Christian groups argue that the Constitution's inclusion of the federally funded Kadhis' courts gives preferential treatment to Muslims.

The Government requires new religious organizations to register with the Registrar of Societies, which reports to the Office of the Attorney General. The Government allows indigenous religious organizations to register, although many choose not to do so. After registration, religious organizations may apply for tax-exempt status, including exemption from paying duty on imported goods. Religious organizations generally received equal treatment from the Government; however, some small splinter groups found it difficult to register when the Government viewed them as an offshoot of a larger religious organization.

The Ministry of Information and Communications routinely approved regional radio and television broadcast licenses for Christian and Muslim groups. The Ministry has not granted the petition of the Catholic Church for a national frequency; however, the Ministry has not granted a national frequency to any media organization except the government-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation.

Practicing witchcraft with intent to cause fear, annoyance, or injury in mind, person, or property is a criminal offense under colonial-era laws; however, persons generally were prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other charge, such as murder, or to preempt vigilante action against them.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas as national holidays. The Government also recognizes Eid al-Adha and Diwali as public holidays for Muslims and Hindus, respectively. Although Eid al-Adha was observed as a national holiday just days before the December 2007 election, the Government subsequently did not take the necessary steps to make the holiday permanent. Eid al-Adha was not observed as a national holiday in December 2008.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In December 2008 the media reported that police prevented hundreds of practitioners of an indigenous religion from traveling to Mount Kenya to pray. Police said they suspected that the group was comprised of members of Mungiki, a banned criminal organization whose members follow indigenous religious practices.

Some Muslim leaders charged that the Government was hostile toward Muslims. According to these leaders, persons with Muslim surnames must provide extra documentation of citizenship, such as birth certificates of parents and even grandparents, in order to acquire identity documents such as birth certificates, national identity cards, and passports.

Muslim leaders also accused the Government of using the pretense of fighting terrorism to arrest and deport Muslim scholars in order to curtail Muslim proselytizing. In November 2008 the Government deported Sheikh Mohammed Yunus Kamoga, a Ugandan citizen and Wahhabi Muslim scholar, to Uganda after he was arrested and questioned by the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU).

In December 2008 the Minister of Immigration failed to renew the visa of prominent Wahhabi Muslim scholar, Sheikh Mohammed Osman Egal, a British citizen. According to press reports, two other foreign Muslim scholars, Sheikh Ismail Rufai and Sheikh Ibrahim Shariff Atass, were also deported during the reporting period.

Some Muslims expressed concern that the lack of a university in Coast Province, with its large Muslim population, hindered educational opportunities for Muslims. An Islamic university near Nairobi was under construction and initially expected to

open in 2009; however, some Muslims noted that since the Government asked the university's founder, Sheikh Egal, to leave the country, it was likely that the university's opening would be delayed, perhaps indefinitely.

In October 2007 President Kibaki appointed a special committee to look into the Muslim community's grievances; however, the completed report was never officially forwarded to the President. The press obtained a copy of the report and published it on August 1, 2008. The report supports the claims of discrimination in the issuance of identity documents and passports to Muslims and found that counterterror operations violated existing national laws. The report also found that Muslims were unlawfully rendered to foreign countries, Muslim communities did not have fair access to obtaining land title deeds, and that the Kadhis' courts were inadequately funded. The matter was raised in Parliament on August 6, 2008, when a Muslim member of parliament confronted the Internal Security Minister on the delay in presenting the report to the President. The Minister reportedly promised to facilitate delivery of the final report, but at the end of the reporting period, the report had not been delivered to the President.

While many in the Muslim community initially welcomed the appointment of the Minister for Immigration and Registration of Persons and his promise to end discrimination against the Muslim community, some believed that the deportation of several prominent Muslim scholars and the Government's failure to accept the report on Muslim grievances demonstrated a lack of progress on these issues.

On June 22, 2009, a woman was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for the possession of charms in violation of the Witchcraft Act. Police arrested the woman on June 18 after she reportedly attended a burial and remained at the site, raising the suspicions of the relatives of the deceased. According to media reports, the police responded immediately to prevent the community from lynching her.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to local Muslim organizations, a September 2008 Human Rights Watch report, and a February 2009 joint report by the UK-based human rights organizations REDRESS and Reprieve, the Government arrested and detained more than 150 Muslims as suspected terrorists, rendering between 85 and 120 of them to Ethiopia and Somalia in early 2007. Some of those detained, the groups claimed, were women and children; detainees were reportedly held for weeks without charge and denied access to a lawyer. The groups did not know the whereabouts of some of the detainees. A president-appointed special committee,

formed in October 2007, heard testimony from persons affected by the operation that included claims of physical and mental abuse, but the final report had not been officially released by the end of the reporting period. On October 4, 2008, eight citizens who had been rendered to Somalia and onward to Ethiopia returned to the country; none were charged with any crime after their return. The Government claimed that the eight who returned were the only nationals found in Ethiopian custody, although the status of a ninth person presumed to be a Kenyan citizen, Abdulrashid Mohammed, was unknown. Shortly after their return, the eight citizens, together with three former detainees of other nationalities, petitioned the High Court for compensation from the Government and the two airlines that reportedly transported them to Somalia. There was no update on the petition at the end of the reporting period.

Muslim human rights activists called for the disbandment of the ATPU, claiming that it was engaging in a systematic campaign of harassment that specifically targeted Muslims, including extortion of businessmen and theft during raids. Although the report was not officially released, the special committee appointed by President Kibaki to look into the Muslim community's grievances reportedly found that the ATPU appeared to be carrying out arrests and operations "outside the law and without due regard to human rights."

The Government of Eritrea maintained close financial ties with the Eritrean Orthodox Church in Kenya, which reported that planted agents stole church funds. On September 13, 2008, after a church official began to investigate the church's finances, Eritrean government officials in Nairobi assaulted the official at his residence with knives and stole approximately \$2,570 (180,000 Kenyan shillings). The police arrested no one, even though the official and several witnesses reported the event.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Intermarriage between members of Christian denominations is common, and interfaith prayer services occur frequently. Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians, although less frequent, is also socially acceptable. However, some Muslims perceived themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country and believed that the Government and business communities deliberately impeded development in predominantly Muslim areas.

There were multiple reports from the southern Rift Valley Province, particularly Bomet and Kisii Districts, as well as the coastal town of Malindi in Coast Province, of abuse and killings of persons suspected of practicing "witchcraft." (Witchcraft in this context refers to a range of traditional practices that may have a religious component.) Local authorities sometimes responded by making arrests after killings of suspected witches or by placing those suspected of witchcraft in protective custody to prevent lynching. In 2008 police in Kisii District reportedly charged 33 persons with murder for killing suspected witches. Government officials routinely denounced vigilantism against suspected witches but also claimed to initiate crackdowns against those practicing traditional medicine. Victims of these crimes were often elderly; perpetrators were often youth and were sometimes related to the victims. Many of these incidents, which perpetrators claimed were aimed at suppressing the practice of witchcraft, appeared to have been efforts to pursue other agendas, such as obtaining access to property owned by the victims or settling family disputes.

On May 6, 2009, local authorities charged nine women in Kiogoro, Kisii District, with abducting an 11-year-old boy and practicing witchcraft on him. One woman allegedly confessed to practicing witchcraft and was sentenced to one year in prison. The two other trials were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Two additional women suspected of participating in the alleged abduction remained at large.

On April 29, 2009, villagers in Malindi beat, bound, and burned alive a married couple, both in their 60s, after the death of their 18-year-old grandson from an illness. Villagers reportedly claimed that the couple had bewitched their grandson after a disagreement with the other grandfather. The local chief of police blamed self-proclaimed seers who claimed to be able to identify witches for inciting the villagers. Police arrested two suspects who were awaiting charges at the end of the reporting period. According to media reports, the April death of the Malindi

couple brought the total number of killings in that area of those suspected of practicing witchcraft to 22 since mid-2008.

In March 2009 an elderly man in Bomet (southern Rift Valley) was denied bail after his arrest for the possession of charms believed to be for witchcraft. While the man denied charges, local authorities expressed worry that the man would be lynched if freed. The man remained in custody at the end of the reporting period.

On February 26, 2009, four women and one man, all of whom were in their 80s, in Nyamataro, Kisii District, were burned alive for suspected witchcraft. Villagers accused them of abducting a child and practicing witchcraft on him. Five suspects were convicted of lynching and sentenced to one year in prison. Eleven other suspects remained at large at the end of the reporting period.

On February 8, 2009, a man in Malindi was kicked and stoned to death, allegedly by his own relatives, after his son's funeral. Family members claimed the man was responsible for his son's death and practiced witchcraft. Police arrested three of the man's relatives and interrogated them. The suspects remained in custody awaiting trial at the end of the reporting period.

On January 26, 2009, a gang of unknown assailants assaulted and fatally cut an assistant chief near his home in Gongoni, Malindi District. Local observers said that the man was suspected of practicing witchcraft.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy made a concerted effort to bridge the gaps that exist between Muslims and Christians and to ensure full respect for the human rights of all.

KIRIBATI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago with an area of 265 square miles and a population of 92,500. Missionaries introduced Christianity into the area in the mid-19th century. According to 2005 government statistics, major religious groups include the Roman Catholic Church, 55 percent; Kiribati Protestant Church, 36 percent; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 3 percent; the Baha'i Faith, 2 percent; and Seventh-day Adventists, 2 percent. Several groups claim to have higher numbers of adherents, but there is no independent confirmation. Persons with no religious affiliation account for less than 1 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic Church are concentrated in the northern islands, while Protestants are the majority in the southern islands.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. The Government does not favor a particular religious group.

The Government observes Easter, Christmas, and National Gospel Day as official holidays.

Although the law requires that a religious organization must be able to claim a certain percentage of the population as members before it may be registered, there are no consequences for not registering. The Mormon Church, which is not registered, was able to perform marriages, own property, and operate schools and churches with no interference from the Government.

Missionaries are present and operate freely.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who were not allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religious groups generally praised the Government for its role in protecting religious freedom. There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream desiring to establish churches in some villages and on outer islands. In a few cases, traditional leaders, such as chiefs, prevented groups from proselytizing or holding meetings. Not wanting to invite conflict, some non-mainstream groups did not attempt to proselytize in villages where they felt unwelcome.

Nonreligious persons, who constitute a very small minority, did not suffer discrimination. Most governmental and social functions begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister or other church officials.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 38,023 square miles and a population of 49 million. According to the most recent census data (2005), the percentages of adherents to the predominant religious communities are: Buddhist, 22.8 percent; Protestant, 18.3 percent; and Roman Catholic, 10.9 percent.

No official figures were available on the membership of other religious groups, which include Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventist Church, Daesun Jinrihoe, Unification Church, and Islam.

According to Gallup Korea's 2004 survey on the state of religion in the country, 36 percent of those who practiced a faith reported that they attended religious services or rituals at a church or temple more than once a week, 10.6 percent attended two to three times per month, 20.6 percent attended once or twice a year, and 4.9 percent did not attend services. Of those who attended more than once a week, Protestants had the highest attendance rate at 71 percent, Catholics at 42.9 percent, and Buddhists at 3.5 percent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion, and the Government does not subsidize or otherwise favor a particular religion. The Constitution requires the separation of church and state.

The Government observes Buddha's Birthday and Christmas as national holidays.

The law requires military service for all Korean national males--24 months in the army, 26 months in the navy, and 27 months for the air force. The law does not protect conscientious objectors, who can receive a maximum 3-year prison sentence. Watchtower International, a Jehovah's Witnesses organization, reported that as of April 1, 2009, there were 465 Jehovah's Witnesses and a handful of others serving an average of 14 months in prison for conscientious objection to military service. An additional 99 Jehovah's Witnesses were in various stages of litigation and are not in detention.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) reversed its earlier position and announced it would not pursue the introduction of an alternative service for conscientious objectors. The Ministry cited lack of public support as the primary reason for its decision; an MND-sponsored poll found that 68.1 percent of respondents opposed instituting alternative service, but an independent poll taken at approximately the same time found that only 38.7 percent were opposed with just less than half of respondents in favor. Meanwhile, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the courts were increasingly sympathetic to the plight of conscientious objectors. In September 2008 a district court asked that the Constitutional Court decide the constitutionality of the conscription law. This case was still pending at the end of the reporting period, but the Constitutional Court ruled in 2002 and 2004 that the law was constitutional.

The Traditional Temples Preservation Law protects historic cultural properties including Buddhist temples, which receive some subsidies from the Government for their preservation and upkeep.

The Government does not require that religious groups be licensed or registered.

There is no specific licensing or registration requirement for foreign missionaries.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Private schools are free to conduct religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In August 2008 tens of thousands of Buddhists protested alleged discrimination by the Government. Buddhist leaders denounced a police search of a temple vehicle for fugitive anti-Lee Myung-bak demonstrators and demanded the dismissal of the Korean National Police Agency commissioner general, who had appeared in a poster promoting a Christian police event. In September President Lee Myung-bak expressed regret that any actions of civil servants had "caused concern within the Buddhist community." The head of the Buddhist Jogye Order accepted an apology from the police commissioner general in November.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Prominent religious leaders regularly met both privately and under government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. The media gave public meetings wide and favorable coverage. For example, the Korean Council of Religious Leaders holds an annual event, the Republic of Korea Religious Culture Festival, which aims to promote reconciliation and mutual understanding among religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also met regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to religious freedom. During the reporting period embassy officials met several times with representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss the imprisonment of conscientious objectors to military service. Embassy officials also engaged the MND on this issue.

KOSOVO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Societal violence decreased marginally, but tensions between communities remained high, especially following the country's declaration of independence in February 2008. Although societal discrimination and violence appeared to be generally ethnically motivated, the close link between ethnicity and religion made it difficult to determine if events were motivated by ethnic or religious animosity.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and religious representatives as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government intervened in specific cases to ensure that places of worship belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and other patrimonial sites were protected.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,211 square miles and a population of two million, although the last credible census was taken in the 1980s. Islam is the predominant faith, professed by most of the majority ethnic Albanian population; the Bosniak, Goran, and Turkish communities; and some members of the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community. However, religion is not a significant factor in public life. Religious rhetoric was largely absent from public discourse in Muslim communities, mosque attendance was low, and public displays of conservative Islamic dress and culture were minimal. The ethnic Serb population in the country, estimated at 100,000 to 120,000, is largely Serbian Orthodox. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Roman Catholics and Protestants. Catholic communities are concentrated around Catholic churches in Prizren, Kline/Klina, and Gjakova/Djakovica. Protestants have small populations in most cities, with the largest concentration located in Pristina.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The law affirms the right to freedom of expression, conscience, and religion to all residents regardless of their religious convictions. It provides for the separation of religious communities from public institutions and for equal rights and obligations to all religious communities, and it stipulates that there is no official religion. The law also defines unique legal provisions that provide equal rights and obligations to all religious communities and prohibits discrimination based on religion and ethnicity.

The Government recognizes as official holidays some but not all Orthodox, Islamic, and Catholic holy days, including Eid al-Adha, the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Easter, Orthodox Easter Monday, and Orthodox and Western Christmases.

There are no mandatory registration regulations for religious groups; however, to purchase property or receive funding from international organizations, religious groups must register with the Ministry of Public Services as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The law and regulations provide for a separation between religious and public spheres and prohibit public education institutions from providing religious education or other such activities promoting a specific religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the Government's respect for religious freedom during the reporting period.

Religious leaders complained that they should have a special status apart from that of NGOs. Islamic leaders complained of a lack of legal status for their religion. Protestant leaders also emphasized this problem, noting that a Protestant church is compelled to use its tax identification number as the only proof of its legal status. Protestants complained that without formal and legal registration the community could not resolve many of the other problems it faced regarding land registration and obtaining building permits.

Protestants alleged institutional discrimination by central and municipal governments. For example, they complained of not being allowed to register property in the names of their churches or establish a Protestant cemetery, frequently resulting in Protestants being buried in Muslim graveyards, with many instances of Muslim clerics performing funeral services for Protestants. Protestants claimed that this was a violation of their right to be buried among those of their faith and an imposition of another religious tradition upon them. Protestants also reported that the lack of a tax exemption for importing donated charitable goods hindered their efforts.

Islamic leaders complained of insufficient attention to religious matters and activities from the national broadcaster Radio-Television Kosovo (RTK). Protestants stated that RTK specifically declined to report on the Protestant religion.

The Ministry of Education prohibited the wearing of headscarves, particularly at schools with obligatory uniforms, despite a 2004 opinion issued by the Ombudsperson that the rule should apply only to teachers and school officials, not students. On December 12, 2008, a daily newspaper reported that a school teacher in the Kline/Klina municipality was suspended from her job for wearing a headscarf to work. The school principal and other municipal officials cited this as a violation of the rule against teachers wearing headscarves. According to the Ombudsperson's Office, the Ministry of Education agreed, and the teacher reportedly decided that she would not return to her job if she could not wear the headscarf. The Ombudsperson also reported that in a similar case from the previous reporting period, the affected teacher later opted to leave her position. In another case in September 2008, the Ombudsperson's regional office in Gjilan/Gnjilane reported that a woman had allegedly been refused a teaching job because she wore a headscarf.

Both the Ombudsperson's Office and the Kosovo Islamic Community (KIC) complained that Muslim students continued to be expelled from public schools for wearing headscarves. The Ombudsperson reported that a case from September 2008 was resolved in the favor of the student, who was eventually allowed to return to school--with a headscarf--in March 2009.

Protestants reported that the municipality of Decan/Decani, citing negative reaction from local citizens, continued to deny them permission to build a church facility on privately owned land they had purchased. A legal case on the building permit in

Decan/Decani remained before the Supreme Court at the end of the reporting period. Protestants also reported other ongoing instances in which their congregations were consistently denied permission to build new church buildings on land owned by the church.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The multiethnic Reconstruction Implementation Commission (RIC) resumed its work in May 2009 to repair churches damaged during the 2004 riots. The SOC resolved internal political issues and agreed to continue participating in the RIC. All RIC stakeholders, including the Government, agreed to a new tendering procedure.

SOC priests, monks, and laypersons occupied several RIC-rebuilt sites during the reporting period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Societal violence decreased marginally, but tensions between communities remained high. Societal discrimination and violence generally appeared to be ethnically motivated, but the close relationship between ethnicity and religion made it difficult to determine if events were motivated by ethnic or religious animosity. While most Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, the designation has more of a cultural than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identify themselves with the SOC, which defines not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives.

There were reports of assaults directed against the Serbian Orthodox community and property, including threats, thefts, and vandalism. There were reported incidents of rock throwing and other assaults against SOC clergy traveling outside their monasteries. In addition, Serbian pilgrims traveling by bus from Serbia to attend services at Decani Monastery often had rocks thrown at their vehicles,

usually by children. In the western municipalities of Peja/Pec, Decan/ Decani, Gjakova/Djakovica, Istog/Istok, Kline/Klina, and Skenderaj, and also in south Mitrovica (areas that include the monasteries of the Peja/Pec Patriarchate, Decani, Gorioc, Budisavci, and Devic), clergy requested and received escorts from the NATO-led international peacekeeping force (KFOR). Clergy stated that they could not visit church members in the west (where the most important SOC holy sites are located) without an escort, and members cited threats to their security as impediments to their ability to visit holy sites. Monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly did not use parts of monastery property, often the land outside the monastery walls, due to safety concerns.

In June 2009 the mayor and other officials of Klina condemned the desecration of a graveyard in the Serb village of Vidanje, where vandals damaged ten gravestones. Several NGOs, including the Kosovo Council for the Defense of Freedoms and Human Rights, also condemned the desecration. The municipal government paid for repair and restoration of the graveyard.

Although Protestants previously reported a slight improvement in their overall situation, they reported increased violence and discrimination during the reporting period. A list of the names of Protestant ministers and missionaries, including Kosovo Albanians and foreign missionaries, along with family names, addresses, telephone numbers, and the names of their respective churches or organizations, remained available on approximately 100 private websites. The information was originally given in November 2007 on the website of the Gjakova/Djakovica branch of the Kosovo Islamic Community.

Individual Protestants alleged verbal discrimination. While several Protestant churches were broken into and robbed during the reporting period, community leaders did not consider these incidents to be motivated by religious discrimination.

Incidents were reportedly directed against the Muslim community, including thefts, vandalism, and threats.

Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim Albanians reported that they had no problems with fellow ethnic Albanians belonging to others of these religious groups. However, there were some problems between Muslim Albanian groups.

On January 9, 2009, a group of nine ethnic Albanians belonging to a Wahhabist sect severely beat Muslim cleric Mullah Osman Musliu while he was entering a

mosque in the Glllogovc/Glogovac village of Zabeli i Ulet. Police detained nine suspects and arrested five of them. On January 16, 2009, Musliu told a local newspaper that he would not allow Wahhabists to take over other local mosques in Glllogovc. Musliu also criticized KIC head Naim Ternava for not standing up against Wahhabism. He told the media that there were some Wahhabist imams preaching without prior approval from the KIC. Also on January 16, 2009, another local newspaper published an article noting that the mosque where the attack took place had been closed. The Glllogovc/Glogovac Islamic Community office reportedly requested that the municipal government take action to prevent Islamic religious activities taking place without KIC approval, citing security concerns.

In early 2009 the Kosovo Police (KP) adopted new operating procedures to provide greater protection for Serb religious and cultural sites. The KP agreed to provide enhanced protection of the most vulnerable Serbian Orthodox sites, as defined by SOC officials. KP officials declared that they had posted a 24-hour guard at the St. Nicholas Church in Pristina. They also reported that they were patrolling near other Serb cultural sites. KFOR reported that it was guarding the Pec, Decani, Budisavci, Gorioç, Devic, and Archangel monasteries.

On September 18, 2008, Jeton Mulaj was convicted of firing a rocket-propelled grenade at Decani Monastery in 2007 and sentenced to three years and six months in prison.

Catholic leaders reported that they had good relations with the Muslim community but little bilateral contact with the SOC leadership. Catholic and SOC leaders believed each other to be highly politicized. The Muslim community also reported good relations with the Catholic leadership but limited interaction with the Orthodox community.

Muslim, Catholic, and some local Orthodox leaders attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in the religious and political spheres. However, a planned follow-on to a 2006 interfaith conference hosted by Norwegian Church Aid continued to be stalled in the planning phase due to the reluctance of the SOC leadership to participate.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and religious representatives as part of its policy to promote ethnic and religious tolerance. Many high-level U.S. government and military officials continued to

meet with political and religious leaders to assess the situation and urge reconciliation and progress toward a more tolerant multiethnic society.

U.S. officials also maintained close contacts and met regularly with religious leaders of the SOC, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities to discuss their concerns and promote interfaith dialogue. U.S. officials urged dialogue between SOC members and ethnic Albanian members of the Government. The U.S. Government continued to support the Government and the Council of Europe in rebuilding religious buildings damaged in the 2004 interethnic riots and to intervene with government officials on behalf of SOC interests when SOC rights were threatened or violated. U.S. peacekeeping troops in KFOR worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence and guarded religious sites.

The U.S. Government continued to fund 80 U.S. police officer positions assigned to the EU-led rule of law mission in the country and provided substantial support to the KP, both of which worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence. U.S. diplomats worked with U.S. military personnel assigned to KFOR to protect religious sites in the U.S. military's area of responsibility and promoted efforts to reconstruct damaged or vandalized churches. U.S. government representatives intervened to protect the integrity of the Decani special zoning area. Restoration work continued on seven reconstruction projects funded under a one million-dollar U.S. government grant as part of UNESCO's effort to preserve the country's religious and cultural heritage.

STATE OF KUWAIT

The Constitution calls for "absolute freedom" of belief and for freedom of religious practice in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals; however, the Government placed some limits on the right of free religious practice. The Constitution states that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is a main source of legislation. Article 12 of the Constitution requires the state to safeguard "the heritage of Islam."

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice and there was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. However, religious minorities experienced some discrimination as a result of governmental policies and non-Sunni Muslims continued to find it difficult or impossible to obtain legal permission to establish new places of worship.

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, although some discrimination was present.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy worked with religious leaders and government officials on specific issues related to religious rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 6,880 square miles and a population of 3.4 million, of whom 1 million are citizens and the rest foreign workers and their families. Estimates derived from voting records and personal status documents indicate that 70 percent of citizens, including the ruling family, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The national census did not distinguish between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. Most of the remaining 30 percent of citizens are Shi'a Muslims. There are approximately 150 to 200 Christian citizens and a small number of Baha'i citizens. An estimated 100,000 noncitizen residents are Shi'a. While some areas have relatively high concentrations of Sunnis or Shi'a, most areas are fairly well integrated religiously.

The Christian population, consisting mostly of expatriates, is estimated to be more than 450,000. The Christian community includes the Roman Catholic Church, with 250,000 to 300,000 members worshipping in two official churches and a third worship facility in a rented house; the Coptic Orthodox Church (70,000 members),

the National Evangelical (Protestant) Church with more than 70 congregations serving 40,000; the Armenian Orthodox Church with 4,000 members; the Greek Orthodox Church (referred to in Arabic as the Roman Orthodox Church) (3,500 members); the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church with 1,000 to 2,000 members who worship in a rented house; and the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church (100 members), which also makes its church available to several thousand other Christians for worship services. There were also Latin, Maronite, Coptic Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Malabar, and Malankara congregations, which all worshipped at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has an estimated 70 members.

There are other unrecognized Christian religious groups, including the Indian Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Thoma, and Seventh-day Adventists; reliable estimates of their numbers are not available.

There are also communities of Hindus (300,000 adherents), Buddhists (100,000), Sikhs (10,000), and Baha'i (400).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for "absolute freedom" of belief and for freedom of religious practice in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals.

The Government exercises direct control of Sunni religious institutions. For example, the Government appoints Sunni imams, monitors their Friday sermons, and pays the salaries of mosque staff. The Government also finances the building of Sunni mosques. The Government does not exert this control over Shi'a mosques, which are funded by the Shi'a community.

The 2006 Press and Publications Law specifically prohibits the publication of any material that attacks religious groups or incites persons to commit crimes, creates hatred, or spreads dissension among the public. The law increased the fines and jail sentences for those who publish material denigrating Islam. It also expanded the scope of what cannot be criticized to include the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

There are laws against blasphemy, apostasy, and proselytizing. While the number of situations to which these laws apply is limited, the Government actively enforces them, especially the prohibition on non-Muslim proselytizing of Muslims.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has official responsibility for overseeing religious groups. Officially recognized churches must deal with a variety of government entities, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (for visas and residence permits for pastors and other staff), the Municipality of Kuwait (for building permits and land concerns), and the Ministry of Interior (for security and police protection for places of worship). While there was reportedly no official government list of recognized churches, seven Christian churches-- National Evangelical, Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Anglican --had at least some form of official recognition enabling them to operate openly. These seven churches had open files at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, allowing them to bring in religious workers and staff to operate their churches, as well as guest lecturers and other visitors.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups appear to be similar to those for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). No religious group received official recognition during the period covered by this report, and unrecognized Christian groups perceived it as impossible to gain official recognition. They therefore worshiped at unofficial, private spaces or borrowed the worship spaces of existing groups. The Government did not interfere with such private gatherings.

The Higher Advisory Committee on Completion of the Application of Islamic Shari'a Provisions is tasked with preparing society for the full implementation of Shari'a in all fields. The committee makes recommendations to the amir on ways in which laws can be brought into better conformity with Shari'a, but it has no authority to enforce such changes. The Constitution states Shari'a is a main source of legislation.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. Most Christians attended church on Fridays and did not cite the inability to go on Sunday as a religious concern. Some workers are able to arrange with their employers to have time on Sunday for worship. Private employers can decide whether to give their non-Muslim employees time off for their holidays.

The Government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools for all students. The Government also requires Islamic religious instruction in private schools that have one or more Muslim students.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or national identity documents.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Shi'a are free to worship according to their faith without government interference, and the overall situation for Shi'a remained stable during the reporting period. However, there were problems. Members of the Shi'a community expressed concern over the relative scarcity of Shi'a mosques due to the Government's slow approval of the construction of new mosques and repair of existing ones (there are 35 Shi'a mosques compared to more than 1,100 Sunni mosques in the country). Since 2001 the Government granted licenses for and approved the construction of six new Shi'a mosques. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs reported that in the future, Shi'a mosques would be built in new residential areas in sufficient numbers to serve the Shi'a populations who move into these areas.

There are hundreds of Shi'a husseiniyas (Shi'a community religious gathering places), most of which are informal or unlicensed. Generally, the country's husseiniyas are privately owned and associated with prominent Shi'a families. Some Shi'as expressed concern about a Municipal Council proposal to impose more stringent regulations on husseiniyas. The Municipal Council controls access to government land and at times reportedly refused to grant land to non-Sunni Muslim religious institutions.

Shi'a who want to serve as imams (clergy) must seek training and education abroad (primarily in Iraq and Iran, and to a lesser degree in Syria), due to the lack of Shi'a jurisprudence courses at Kuwait University's College of Islamic Law. At the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Education was reviewing a Shi'a application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics. In 2008 Shi'a member of Parliament Saleh Ashour called for the Ministry of Education to remove references from high school Islamic education textbooks specifically declaring some Shi'a religious practices heretical. Sunni scholars author the books, which are entirely based on the Sunni interpretation of Islam. A governmental committee, formed to study the issue of removing references that are offensive to Shi'a Islam, was inactive.

Some Shi'a government employees reportedly had more difficulty in obtaining advancement in certain government agencies. However, since 2006, the Prime Minister has regularly appointed two Shi'a ministers to the 14-member cabinet, most recently in January 2009.

The Government did not permit public reenactments of the martyrdom of Hussein or public marches for the commemoration of Ashura in 2007 or 2008. The Government provided security to Shi'a neighborhoods, however, and allowed worshipers to gather peacefully in public spaces to participate in Ashura rituals. For the second year in a row, a Shi'a member of Parliament publicly lauded the Ministry of Interior's efforts in successfully managing security during the Ashura holiday.

Seven Christian denominations are widely understood to enjoy full recognition by the Government and are allowed to operate as official churches: Catholic, National Evangelical, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Anglican. These religious groups operated freely on their premises and held worship services without government interference. Their leaders also stated that the Government generally was supportive of their presence, providing police security and traffic control as needed. Other Christian denominations (including Indian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Mormons, and Seventh-day Adventists) were not legally recognized but were allowed to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of recognized churches. Members of these congregations reported that they were able to worship without government interference provided that they did not disturb their neighbors or violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

Churches outside of the seven recognized denominations are prohibited from displaying exterior signs, including a cross or the congregation's name, or engaging in other public activities, such as ringing bells. Some churches without the financial resources to rent a location were able to gather in schools on the weekends, although representatives from the churches reported that the schools were pressured to stop allowing such gatherings.

Melkite Catholics worshipped in a rented house, which two other Indian Catholic denominations also used for worship services. A 2005 application by Melkite Catholics to obtain land for a church was pending action by the Council of Ministers. The Armenian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches were allowed to operate openly, hire employees, invite religious speakers, and conduct other such activities without government interference; however, according to government

records, their facilities were registered as private homes. They also rented facilities from private citizens for worship services and other religious purposes; however, this would place them in a vulnerable position if the owner stopped renting, since it is difficult to find landlords willing to rent to religious groups.

The Government imposed quotas on the number of clergy and staff the seven recognized religious groups could bring into the country. Most churches found the quotas insufficient. Most of the groups considered their existing facilities inadequate to serve their respective communities. They faced significant problems in trying to build new facilities.

There is no specific law banning the establishment of non-Muslim places of worship; however, in practice the few groups that applied for licenses to build new places of worship were denied permission. Some religious groups understood this to mean that it is impossible to gain a license for a new place of worship and have therefore been deterred from applying.

The Government actively supports Sunni Muslim proselytism and does not allow conversion from Islam. While such conversions reportedly occurred, they did so quietly and discreetly. Known converts reportedly faced harassment, including loss of job, repeated summonses to police stations, arbitrary arrest and detention, physical and verbal abuse, police monitoring of their activities, and property damage without legal recourse. If prosecuted, a person who converted from Islam would likely face legal problems in personal status and property matters before the courts.

The Government forbids non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and places limits on the number of religious leaders allowed to work for the few churches that have legal status. Religious leaders of unrecognized groups must come as nonreligious workers and perform their religious duties outside their regular employment.

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing among Muslims; however, they may serve non-Muslim congregations.

The Islam Presentation Committee (IPC), under the authority of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, actively encouraged proselytizing Islam to non-Muslims. The IPC maintained an office at the Central Prison to provide religious education and information to inmates and reportedly extended its proselytizing efforts to embassies that shelter foreign workers facing problems. An NGO that

receives governmental financial support to obtain the early release of nonviolent offenders also proselytized in the prisons.

Article 19 of the Press and Publication Law prohibits denigration of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, and other Islamic religious figures and requires jail terms for journalists who defame any religion. Academic freedom is limited in practice by self-censorship. Academics and journalists are legally prohibited from criticizing Islam. The law also provides that any Muslim citizen may file criminal charges against an author if the citizen believes that the author has defamed Islam, the ruling family, or public morals.

In November 2008 a controversy over the admittance of Iranian Shi'a cleric Mohammad Fali into Kuwait and comments by him, which allegedly denigrated Sunni Islam, led to a conflict between the parliament and the Prime Minister. Prior to the incident, Fali had been formally banned from entering because he had allegedly insulted some of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, who are revered by Sunnis. When the Prime Minister admitted Fali into the country in November 2008 in violation of this ban, three Salafi members of Parliament made a formal request to question the Prime Minister. This and subsequent requests to question the Prime Minister over financial mismanagement led Kuwait's Amir to dissolve parliament in March 2009.

The Government does not permit the establishment of non-Islamic religious publishing companies or training institutions for clergy. Nevertheless, several churches published religious materials solely for their congregations' use. A private company, the Book House Company Ltd., was permitted to import Bibles and other Christian religious materials, including videotapes and compact discs, for use solely by government -recognized church congregations and as long as the materials do not insult Islam. The Book House Company Ltd. was the only company that had an import license to bring in such materials, which require approval by government censors.

Some domestic workers reported that their employers confiscated religious articles such as Bibles and rosary beads, along with nonreligious items.

Although the Government usually does not issue travel documents to its 100,000 Bidoon residents, stateless Arabs living in Kuwait, it made an exception to these policies to allow the Bidoon to make the Hajj pilgrimage. However, Bidoon were required to turn in their travel documents upon returning to the country.

Shi'a remained underrepresented in upper levels of the Government. In 2008 five Shi'a were elected to the 50-member National Assembly, compared with four Shi'a in the previous assembly.

There were no known Shi'a in the state security forces, and they were reportedly underrepresented in the National Guard. Many Shi'a complained of a "glass ceiling" that prevents them from obtaining leadership positions. While such complaints were credible, they stemmed more from the decisions of individuals than a coordinated government policy. A notable exception was the September 16, 2009 appointment of retired Lieutenant General Ali Al-Mou'min, a Shi'a, as the country's first Ambassador to Baghdad since the Iraqi invasion of 1990.

Personal status law is administered through religious courts, and the Government permits Shi'a to follow their own jurisprudence in matters of personal status and family law at the first-instance and appellate levels. The Government approved a long-standing Shi'a request to establish a Shi'a court of cassation (Supreme Court) to handle Shi'a personal status issues. However, the court had not yet been established, according to a Shi'a government official, because it was unable to identify sufficiently qualified Shi'a judges.

The Government approved another long-standing Shi'a request for the establishment of an independent Shi'a Waqf, an agency to administer religious endowments. The Shi'a Waqf was able to carry out its work freely.

Members of religious groups not sanctioned in the Qur'an, such as Baha'i, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, may not build places of worship or other religious facilities. Unrecognized religious groups are allowed to worship privately in their homes without government interference.

The Sikh community was able to worship freely in private homes. The community reported that it had not been able to find a landlord willing to rent them a space to be used for religious purposes. They were unable to gain permission for a crematorium to cremate their deceased. Sikhs engaged in other religious activities, including public marriage and other celebrations, without government interference.

The law prohibits organized religious education for other than Islam, although this law was not enforced rigidly. Informal religious instruction occurred inside private homes and on church compounds without government interference; however, there were reports that government inspectors from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic

Affairs periodically visited public and private schools outside of church compounds to ensure that religious teaching other than of Islam did not take place.

During the reporting period, the Government had not responded to the request from the Catholic Church to permit Catholic students in certain private schools to study the Catechism separately during the period allotted for instruction in Islam.

The Catholic Church faced severe overcrowding at its two official church facilities. Its cathedral in downtown Kuwait City regularly drew tens of thousands of worshippers to its more than 20 weekly services in several languages. Due to limited space on the compound, the Church was unable to construct any new buildings. The National Evangelical Church, which served a weekly average of 20,000 worshippers in more than 70 congregations, was also significantly overcrowded. The church wanted more land to build a new church but did not make an official request.

The Coptic Orthodox Church reported that it had excellent relations with the Government and faced no difficulties in bringing church workers and guests into the country. The Government was extremely cooperative in providing permits to erect tents on adjacent lots to handle the crowds during Christian holidays. The church's main challenge was the overcrowding at its small facility in Kuwait City. The Government determined it would have to demolish the church building to make way for a new road but granted the church 6,500 square meters of land in Hawally District to build a new place of worship; however, it did not offer any financial assistance to construct the new church. Construction began in the first quarter of 2006, and the Church expected construction to be completed in 2009. The Government decided to work around the church building until the new facility is completed and the old one can be demolished.

The Government controls the content delivered by imams and preachers, who must sign a "mosque compact" detailing their commitment to stay within certain boundaries in their sermons.

At the annual book fair held at the International Fairgrounds in November 2008, the Ministry of Information banned approximately 500 books that it deemed "radical" or "extremist." Some of these books were associated with the Salafi movement in Islam.

Although there was a small community of approximately 150 to 200 acknowledged Christian citizens, a 1980 law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims. Christian citizens are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their descendents.

The law forbids marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. A non-Muslim female is not required by law to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim male; however in practice, many non-Muslim women face strong economic and societal pressure to convert. Failure to convert may mean that, should the couple later divorce, the Muslim father would be granted custody of any children. A non-Muslim woman who fails to convert also is ineligible to inherit her husband's property or to be naturalized.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of the Government prohibiting state employees from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States.

There were cases in which U.S. citizen children were prevented from returning to the United States; however, there were no reports that such children were forced to convert to Islam, or that forced conversion was the reason the children were not allowed to return to the United States during the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In contrast with the previous reporting period, there was little activity by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs under its recently expanded "moderation initiative" of tolerance-promoting conferences and lectures.

Section III. Status of Respect for Religious Freedom

In general, citizens were open and tolerant of other religious groups; however, there is a minority that opposes the presence of non-Muslim groups in the country and rejects the legitimacy of Muslims of sects other than their own.

While some discrimination based on religion reportedly occurred on a personal level, most observers agreed that it was neither systematic nor widespread.

Some church officials reported that domestic workers complained of their employers not allowing them to leave their homes, thus making it impossible for them to worship with their congregations.

During the reporting period, there was continued debate over whether it was proper for Muslims to wish non-Muslims well on their religious holidays. While a small number of conservatives opposed the practice, most found no problem with it, and none of the many stores that had Christmas-themed displays reported negative incidents.

Dr. Ahmad Duaij, a columnist for the local *Al-Watan* newspaper, wrote several anti-Semitic articles in which he denied the Holocaust. Many mosque preachers continued using anti-Semitic language, especially during and after the Israeli invasion of Gaza. The Government did not publicly respond to these articles or censor the mosque preachers.

Ecumenical dialogue took place among Christian denominations through the framework of a council representing Christian leaders from various churches and through numerous informal meetings.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Intensive monitoring of religious freedom matters remained an embassy priority. Embassy officials met frequently with recognized Sunni, Shi'a, and Christian groups, as well as representatives of various unrecognized religious groups and NGOs that deal with religious freedom concerns.

The Ambassador and other embassy officers actively encouraged the Government to address the concerns of religious leaders, such as overcrowding, lack of adequate worship space, lack of access to religious materials, insufficient staffing, and bureaucratic delays in processing routine requests. During the reporting period, embassy officials met with senior representatives from the major recognized Christian denominations, encouraged them to present their concerns in a unified manner to the Government, and advocated on their behalf in high-level meetings with government officials.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. However, other laws and policies threatened to limit the free practice of religion. The Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, and it prohibits discrimination based on religion or religious beliefs. The Government did not officially support any religion; however, a 2006 decree recognized Islam and Russian Orthodoxy as "traditional religious groups." The State Agency for Religious Affairs (SARA) is responsible for promoting religious tolerance, protecting freedom of conscience, and overseeing laws on religion. All religious organizations, including schools, must apply for approval of registration from SARA.

Government respect for religious freedom was restricted during the reporting period. On January 12, 2009, the Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations ("Religion Law") was enacted, establishing numerous restrictions on the activities of religious groups. The Government continued to monitor and restrict Islamic groups it considered threats to stability and security and hampered the registration process for some Christian churches.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Tensions continued between Muslims and former Muslims who had converted to other religious groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy monitored the drafting and implementation of the new law on religion and maintained contact with government officials, leaders of religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) regarding religious affairs. The U.S. Government sponsored lectures, discussions, and exchanges to promote awareness of international religious freedom standards, religious tolerance, and interaction between religious groups and the state.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 77,181 square miles and a population of 5.2 million. Data from a 2008 National Statistics Committee report indicated the following ethnic breakdown: Kyrgyz, 69.2 percent; Uzbeks, 14.5 percent; Russians, 8.7 percent; Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims), 1.2 percent; Uighurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), 1 percent; and other ethnicities, 5.4 percent.

Islam is the most widely held faith. Official sources estimated that 80 percent of the population is Muslim. Almost all Muslims are Sunni; there are approximately 1,000 Shi'a. According to SARA, as of June 2009 there were 1,706 mosques, of which 1,679 were registered. There also were seven institutes for higher Islamic teaching. According to recent official estimates, 11 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, although some experts believe the figure could be as low as 8 percent. The country has 44 Russian Orthodox churches, one Russian Orthodox monastery for women, and one parochial school, as well as two Russian Old Believer churches.

Other religious groups account for a smaller percentage of the population. Of those, the Protestant Church of Jesus Christ is the largest, with an estimated 11,000 members, of whom approximately 40 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz. The overall Protestant population includes 48 registered Baptist churches and 21 Lutheran, 49 Pentecostal, 35 Presbyterian, 43 "Charismatic," 49 Jehovah's Witnesses, and 30 Seventh-day Adventist communities. There are three Roman Catholic churches. The small Jewish community has one synagogue and organizes internal cultural studies and humanitarian services, chiefly food assistance for the elderly and persons with disabilities regardless of faith. One Buddhist temple serves the small Buddhist community. There are 12 registered Baha'i houses of worship. During the reporting period, SARA approved the registration of an additional three Islamic and two Christian religious education institutions and 61 Islamic and Christian religious organizations.

Islam is practiced widely throughout the country in both urban and rural areas. Russian Orthodox believers typically are concentrated in cities with a larger ethnic Russian population. Other religious groups more commonly practice in the cities where their smaller communities tend to be concentrated. There is a correlation between ethnicity and religion; ethnic Kyrgyz are primarily Muslims, while ethnic Russians usually belong to either the Russian Orthodox Church or one of the Protestant denominations. However, some Christian pastors noted a growing number of ethnic Kyrgyz converts to Christianity. While there are no data available on active participation in formal religious services, a significant number of Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents appear to be nominal believers and do not practice their faith actively. Religious practice in the south is more traditional and devout than in other regions.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. However, other laws and policies threatened to limit the free practice of religion. The Government restricted the activities of Islamic groups it considered to be extremist and threats to security. The 2007 Constitution defines the country as a sovereign, unitary, democratic social state based on the rule of law with separation of religion and state.

Article 8 of the Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties on religious and ethnic grounds, as well as activities of religious organizations that jeopardize the state, constitutional system, or national security. Article 85 of the Constitution gives the Constitutional Court the authority to determine the constitutionality of a religious organization's activities.

While the 2009 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations affirms that all religions and religious organizations are equal, the law introduced significant restrictions. Article 4 of the 2009 Religion Law prohibits the involvement of minors in religious organizations. Article 5 of the law strictly prohibits the conversion of citizens from one religion to another (proselytism). While Article 22 of the law protects the right of religious organizations to produce, import, export, and distribute religious literature and materials, in accordance with established procedures, all religious literature and materials are subject to examination by state experts. The law prohibits the distribution of religious literature and materials in public locations, including individual households, schools, and other institutions.

The Religion Law requires the registration of all religious organizations with SARA. SARA can deny or postpone the certification of a particular religious group if it believes the proposed activities of that group are not religious in character. Unregistered religious organizations are prohibited from actions such as renting space and holding religious services, although many hold regular services without government interference.

Organizations applying for registration must have at least 200 adult citizen members, a significant increase from 10 members prior to the passage of the religion law, and must submit an application form, organizational charter, minutes of an institutional meeting, and a list of founding members to SARA for review. SARA recommends rejection when a religious organization does not comply with the law or is considered a threat to national security, social stability, interethnic and interdenominational harmony, public order, health, or morality. An applicant

whose registration is denied may reapply and may appeal to the courts. The registration process with SARA is often cumbersome, taking a month to several years for completion. Each congregation must register separately.

If approved, a religious organization may choose to complete the registration process with the Ministry of Justice to obtain status as a legal entity, which is necessary to own property, open bank accounts, and otherwise engage in contractual activities. If a religious organization engages in commercial activity, it is required to pay taxes.

Missionaries of various religious groups may operate with restrictions and are required to register annually. Since 1996 SARA has registered more than 1,203 foreign citizens as religious missionaries, 46 of whom were registered during the reporting period. Any religious entity founded by a foreigner must reregister each year with SARA, although the process is much less cumbersome than the initial registration.

The Religion Law allows for the teaching in public schools of religious science disciplines the state deems as mainstream if they do not conflict with the country's laws. Under the auspices of the Muftiate, volunteers called Davatchi visited villages in the south to teach traditional Islamic values.

The Government recognizes two Muslim holy days, Kurman Ait (Eid al-Adha) and Orozo Ait (Eid al-Fitr), and Orthodox Christmas as national holidays. The President and the Government send greetings to Muslims and Orthodox adherents on their major holy days, and the greetings are printed in the mass media.

The Government continued to express concern publicly about groups it viewed as extremist because of radical religious or political agendas, particularly Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). HT is an extremist Islamist political organization motivated by a socioreligious ideology that is virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western and calls for the overthrow of secular governments. The Government was particularly concerned about the threat of political Islam, whose followers it labels "Wahhabists."

Established in 1993, the Muftiate (or Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan) is the highest Islamic managing body in the country. The Muftiate oversees all Islamic entities, including institutes and madrassahs, mosques, and Islamic organizations. The Mufti is the official head of the Muftiate and is elected by the Council of Ulemas, which consists of 30 Islamic clerics and scholars. A

Muftiate-established commission reviews and standardizes Islamic educational literature printed and distributed in the country and reviews new books on Islamic themes prior to publication. The Muftiate has the authority to ban publications that do not meet established standards, an initiative it started and the Government supports.

The Islamic University oversees all Islamic schools, including madrassahs, to develop a standardized curriculum and curb the spread of extremist religious teaching. This program continued during the reporting period.

According to a February 2008 government press statement, Prime Minister Chudinov approved an action plan designed to prevent the "proliferation of extremism, fundamentalism, and religious conflicts." The initiative aims to curb the activities of religious extremist groups presumed to be operating in the country.

A 2005 law on "Countering Extremist Activity" seeks to "halt extremist activities by religious organizations or groups." Law enforcement officials continued under this law to detain members of banned organizations, such as HT, for distributing leaflets and other materials deemed extremist.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Upon passage of the 2009 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations, respect for religious freedom was further restricted. The Government continued to restrict the activities of Islamic groups it considered threats to security.

In 2003 the Supreme Court sustained a ban on four political organizations, citing extremism and alleged ties to international terrorist organizations: HT, the Islamic Party of Turkestan, the Organization for Freeing Eastern Turkestan, and the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party. On June 16, 2008, the Pervomaisky district court of Bishkek identified one additional religious group, Jamaat al-Jihad al-Islamias, as a terrorist organization. During a press conference in May 2008, the head of SARA estimated underground membership in HT to have reached 15,000.

Several religious groups had difficulties registering. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), which initially applied for registration with SARA in 2004, was still not registered at the end of the reporting period. Leaders of the Hare Krishna temple in Bishkek, after attempting unsuccessfully to register several times in the last three years, planned to resubmit the application for registration

once a legal dispute over ownership of their temple location was resolved. Religious leaders attributed their registration delays to erroneous or insufficient applications.

Several Christian groups reported delays in receiving visas for their missionaries who attempted to visit the country. At least three foreign missionaries were deported for violation of their visa status or other laws in relation to their religious activities.

SARA regularly monitored religious services, taking photographs and asking questions. A SARA official stated that personnel from the agency would attend religious services regularly in order to monitor and analyze them.

On February 19, 2009, the Minister of Education signed a decree that officially banned students from wearing religious clothing, particularly the hijab or traditional Islamic headscarf, in public schools. On March 10, after local NGOs and parents gathered signatures in protest of the decree, the Minister amended the decree from an official ban to a recommendation. NGOs reported that disputes between public school directors and students regarding religious clothing continued.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no further reports on the investigation into the 2006 alleged killing by security service special forces of Mukhammadrafiq Kamalov, imam of the largest mosque in Karasuu. Security officials believed he was affiliated with the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, allegations that his family denied and that officials later conceded may have been incorrect.

On several occasions during the period covered by this report, police detained members of the Islamic political organization HT for the distribution or possession of leaflets, DVDs, or CDs with content deemed by the authorities to be of an extremist nature. In general, defendants were fined or given suspended sentences for these offenses.

On October 1, 2008, Nookat administration officials rejected a request by local Muslims to celebrate Orozo Ait (Eid al-Fitr) in the town square, an event the local administration had approved in prior years. Clashes between the authorities and Muslims ensued after the unexpected ban on Eid celebrations. Thirty-two participants were charged with incitement of mass disorder, attempted disruption

of the constitutional order, and attempted spread of ethnic and religious hatred, among other crimes. All 32 defendants were convicted and sentenced to between five and 17 years in prison. Officials claimed that the defendants, along with other demonstrators, were supporters of or affiliated with HT.

Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on March 19-20, 2009 in the town of Mailuu Suu, Jalalabad Oblast, Ministry of Interior officers detained six of their members for several hours, raided their homes, and confiscated their religious literature. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Ministry officers cited the new law's ban on distribution of religious materials outside officially registered religious facilities, as their legal authority to conduct the search and seizure operation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was evidence of periodic tension in rural areas between conservative Muslims, on the one hand, and foreign Christian missionaries and individuals from traditionally Muslim ethnic groups who had converted to other religious groups. Both Muslim and Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders criticized the proselytizing activities of nontraditional Christian groups.

Protestant pastors complained of ongoing difficulties interring deceased parishioners who had converted from Islam to Christianity. Local Islamic and community leaders opposed the burial of converts in Islamic cemeteries. Officially, cemetery plots are under government control, but usually local Islamic figures oversee them. The Government allocated additional land for Protestant cemeteries in an effort to resolve the problem; however, the scarcity of such cemeteries forced Christians to travel great distances to bury their deceased.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy monitored the drafting and implementation of the new Religion Law and maintained contact with government officials regarding religious affairs. Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with NGOs monitoring religious freedom.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored a series of events to promote awareness of religious freedom, including a roundtable with Members of Parliament and civil society on the new law on religion. USAID's legal education program brings together secondary students from secular and religious schools to discuss the relevance of law to religious and ethnic conflict issues.

Through the U.S. Government-funded Community Connections program, 30 religious leaders representing a variety of denominations and government officials who have a supervisory role over religious affairs traveled to the United States. Three groups of 10 participants learned about overcoming contemporary challenges professional women face in Islam, the comparison of religious and secular education, and the role of medical professionals and religious leaders in community development.

During the reporting period, the Embassy conducted several presentations for students of theology departments in Bishkek and southern provinces on religious freedom, diversity, and tolerance in the United States and distributed publications in Russian and Kyrgyz about Muslim life in the United States.

LAOS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, other laws and policies restricted this right in practice. The Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice (Decree 92) is the principal legal instrument defining rules for religious practice; it institutionalizes the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. Although this decree has contributed to greater religious tolerance since it was promulgated in 2002, authorities, particularly at the provincial and district levels, have used its many conditions to restrict some aspects of religious practice.

During the reporting period, the overall status of respect for religious freedom did not significantly change. As during previous reporting periods, officials in urban areas tended to show more acceptance of religious practice, with more difficulties encountered in rural areas. The law does not recognize a state religion; however, the Government's financial support and promotion of Buddhism, along with its willingness to exempt Buddhism from a number of restrictions, gave the religion an elevated status. In most areas, officials generally respected the constitutionally guaranteed rights of members of most religious groups to worship, albeit within strict constraints imposed by the Government. Authorities in some of the country's 17 provinces continued to be suspicious of non-Buddhist religious communities and displayed intolerance for minority religious practice, particularly Protestant groups, whether or not they were officially recognized.

Local officials reportedly interfered with the right of Protestants to worship in a number of places, particularly in Luang Namtha and Bolikhamsai Provinces. Arrests and detentions of Protestants reportedly occurred during the reporting period in Luang Namtha, Phongsali, and Savannakhet Provinces. Local officials reportedly pressured Protestants to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages in Bolikhamsai, Houaphan, Salavan, Luang Prabang, Attapeu, Oudomsai, and Luang Namtha Provinces.

At the end of the reporting period, there were two known religious prisoners, both Protestants. A number of other Protestants were being detained for reasons other than their religion, although religion was alleged to have been a contributing factor in their arrests.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, conflicts between ethnic groups and

movement among villages sometimes exacerbated religious tensions. Proselytizing and rights to village resources were particular points of contention. Frictions also arose over the refusal of some members of minority religious groups, particularly Protestants, to participate in local Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies. The efforts of some Protestant congregations to establish churches independent of the government-sanctioned Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) continued to cause strains within the Protestant community.

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy also maintained frequent contact with religious leaders. Official visitors from the U.S. Government, including a specialist from the Office of International Religious Freedom, reinforced embassy efforts by raising religious freedom issues during their meetings with Lao officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 85,000 square miles and a population of 6.7 million. Theravada Buddhism is the faith of nearly all of the ethnic or "lowland" Lao population, who constitute only 40-50 percent of the overall population of the country. The remainder of the population belongs to at least 48 distinct ethnic minority groups. Most of these ethnic minorities are practitioners of animism and ancestor worship, with beliefs that vary greatly among groups. Animism is predominant among most Sino-Thai groups, such as the Thai Dam and Thai Daeng, as well as among Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Even among lowland Lao, many pre-Buddhist animistic beliefs have been incorporated into Theravada Buddhist practice. Roman Catholics and Protestants constitute approximately 2 percent of the population. Other minority religious groups include those practicing the Baha'i Faith, Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, and Confucianism. A very small number of citizens follow no religion.

Theravada Buddhism is by far the most prominent organized religion in the country, with more than 4,000 temples serving as the focus of religious practice and the center of community life in rural areas. In most lowland Lao villages, religious tradition remains strong. Most Buddhist men spend some part of their lives as monks in temples, even if only for a few days. There are approximately 20,000 monks in the country, more than 8,000 of whom have attained the rank of "senior monk," indicating years of study in temples. In addition, more than 400 nuns, many of whom are older widows, reside in temples throughout the country. The Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization (LBFO) is under the direction of a

supreme patriarch who resides in Vientiane and supervises the activities of the LBFO's central office, the Ho Thammasapha.

Although officially incorporated into the dominant Mahanikai School of Buddhist Practice after 1975, the Thammayudh sect of Buddhism still maintains a following in the country. Abbots and monks of several temples, particularly in Vientiane, reportedly follow the Thammayudh School, which places greater emphasis on meditation and discipline.

There are four Mahayana Buddhist temples in Vientiane, two serving the ethnic Vietnamese community and two serving the ethnic Chinese community. Buddhist monks from Vietnam, China, and India have visited these temples freely to conduct services and minister to worshippers. There are at least four large Mahayana Buddhist pagodas in other urban centers and smaller Mahayana temples in villages near the borders of Vietnam and China.

Church officials estimate there are approximately 45,000 Catholics; many are ethnic Vietnamese, concentrated in major urban centers and surrounding areas along the Mekong River in the central and southern regions. The Catholic Church has an established presence in five of the most populous central and southern provinces, and Catholics are generally able to worship openly. No ordained Catholic priests operated in the north, and the Church's activities there remain restricted. There are four bishops, two located in Vientiane Municipality and the others in Thakhek city in Khammouan Province and Pakse city in Champasak Province. One of the bishops oversees the Vientiane Diocese and is responsible for the central part of the country. The second bishop resident in Vientiane is the Bishop of Luang Prabang. He is assigned to the northern part of the country. While the Government did not permit him to take up his post, it permitted him to travel intermittently to visit church congregations in the north including in Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, and Bokeo Provinces. The Catholic Church's property in Luang Prabang was seized after the current Government took power in 1975, and there is no longer a parsonage in that city. An informal Catholic training center in Thakhek prepared a small number of priests to serve the Catholic community. Catholic personnel have also been able to go to Australia and the Philippines for training. Several foreign nuns temporarily serve in the Vientiane Diocese and work with families, the elderly, and younger members.

The Protestant community has grown rapidly over the past decade, and LEC officials estimate that Protestants number as many as 100,000. More than 400 LEC congregations conduct services throughout the country. The LEC maintains

properties in the cities of Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Pakse, and LEC officials confirm LEC ownership is recognized in all three locations by the authorities. Many Protestants are members of ethnic Mon-Khmer groups, especially the Khmu in the north and the Brou in Savannakhet and nearby provinces. Protestantism also has expanded rapidly in the Hmong and Yao communities. In urban areas, Protestantism has attracted many lowland Lao followers. Most Protestants are concentrated in Vientiane Municipality, in the provinces of Vientiane, Sayaboury, Luang Prabang, Xiang Khouang, Bolikhamsai, Savannakhet, Champasak, and Attapeu, as well as in the former Saisomboun Special Zone, but smaller congregations are located throughout the country. Seventh-day Adventists number slightly more than 1,200 countrywide, the majority of whom reside in Vientiane Municipality. The group also has congregations in Bokeo, Bolikhamsai, Champasak, Luang Prabang, and Xiang Khouang Provinces.

Christian groups that have some following, but which are not recognized by the Government, include Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Lutherans, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Baptists. Official membership numbers are not available.

All three approved Christian groups own properties in Vientiane Municipality. In addition, three informal churches, one each for English-speakers, Korean-speakers, and Chinese-speakers, serve Vientiane's foreign Protestant community.

There are approximately 500 adherents of Islam, the vast majority of whom are foreign permanent residents of South Asian or Cambodian (ethnic Cham) origin. There are two active mosques in Vientiane, where the majority of Muslims reside. The Vientiane mosques follow the Sunni branch of Islam, but both are open to visits by Shi'ites as well. There are also very small numbers of Muslims living in provincial cities, including an estimated 3-4 in Pakse in Champasak Province and 2-3 in Luang Prabang, although there are no mosques in these locations.

Baha'i leaders estimated the Baha'i Faith has 8,500 adherents. A 9-member Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly oversees Baha'i activities including its five centers: two in Vientiane Municipality, one in Vientiane Province, one in Savannakhet Province, and a new center established in Paksane District of Bolikhamsai Province. A small number of Baha'is also live in Khammouane Province and in Pakse City in Champasak Province, and outreach is underway in Oudomsai, Xiang Khouang, Luang Prabang, and Salavan Provinces.

Small groups of followers of Confucianism and Taoism practice their beliefs in the larger cities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, other laws and policies, particularly at the local level, sometimes violate this right. Article 30 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, a fact frequently cited by officials in reference to religious tolerance. Article 9 of the Constitution, however, discourages all acts that create divisions among religious groups and persons. The Government has interpreted this clause to justify restrictions on religious practice by all religious groups, including the Buddhist majority and animists. Both local and central government officials widely refer to Article 9 as a reason for placing constraints on religious practice, especially proselytizing and the expansion of Protestantism among minority groups. The Constitution also notes that the state "mobilizes and encourages" Buddhist monks and novices as well as priests of other religions to participate in activities "beneficial to the nation and the people." Although official pronouncements acknowledge the positive benefits of religion and the existence of different religious groups, they emphasize religion's potential to divide, distract, and destabilize.

Decree 92 is the principal legal instrument defining rules for religious practice. Decree 92 defines the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. Although this decree has contributed to greater religious tolerance since it was promulgated in 2002, authorities have used its many conditions to restrict some aspects of religious practice, particularly at the provincial and district levels.

In its 20 articles, Decree 92 establishes guidelines for religious activities in a broad range of areas. While the decree provides that the Government "respects and protects legitimate activities of believers," it also seeks to ensure that religious practice "conforms to the laws and regulations." Decree 92 legitimizes proselytizing by Lao citizens, printing religious materials, owning and building houses of worship, and maintaining contact with overseas religious groups; however, all of these rights are contingent upon a strict approval process. Decree 92 reserves for the LFNC the "right and duty to manage and promote" religious practice, requiring that nearly all aspects of religious practice receive the approval of an LFNC branch office. Some cases require approval from the central-level

LFNC. In practice, the Government used the approval process to restrict the religious activities of certain groups and effectively limited or prevented some religious denominations from importing Bibles and religious materials as well as constructing houses of worship. Many minority religious leaders complained that the requirement to obtain permission, sometimes from several different offices, for a broad range of activities greatly limited their freedom.

The Government officially recognized four religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Recognized Christian groups include the Catholic Church, the LEC, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Although Decree 92 establishes procedures for new denominations to register, the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for purposes of control has effectively blocked new registrations. The LFNC's Order Number 1 of March 2004 required all Protestant groups to become a part of the LEC or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The order stated that no other Christian denominations would be permitted to register, a measure to prevent "disharmony" in the religious community. Although denominations not registered with the LFNC are not legally allowed to practice their faith, several do so quietly without interference.

The Government required several religious groups, apparently with the exception of Buddhists and Catholics, to report membership information periodically to the Religious Affairs Department of the LFNC. The Government also maintained restrictions on the publication of religious materials that applied to most religious groups, except for Buddhists.

Although the Government does not recognize an official state religion, the Government's exemption of Buddhism from many of the Decree 92 restrictions, sponsorship of Buddhist facilities, increased incorporation of Buddhist ritual and ceremony in state functions, and promotion of Buddhism as an element of the country's cultural and spiritual identity gave Theravada Buddhism an elevated status.

Both the Constitution and Decree 92 assert that religious practice should serve national interests by promoting development and education and instructing believers to be good citizens. The Government presumed both a right and a duty to oversee religious practice at all levels to ensure religious practice fills these roles in society. In effect this has led the authorities, particularly at the provincial, district, and local levels, to intervene in the activities of minority religious groups,

particularly Protestants, on the grounds that their practices did not promote national interests or demonstrated disloyalty to the Government.

Since 2001 the Government has more closely scrutinized the activities of the small Muslim community in Vientiane but has not interfered with its religious activities. Muslims were able to practice their faith openly and attend the two active mosques. Daily prayers and the weekly Jumaat prayer on Fridays proceeded unobstructed, and all Islamic celebrations were allowed. Adherents from the two mosques belong to one Muslim Association. Government officials, including LFNC members from Vientiane Municipality and the local level, were invited to and attended Islamic festivals held by the Association. Muslims were permitted to go on the Hajj, but apparently none have done so since 2000 because of the expense. Groups have come from Thailand to conduct Tabligh teachings for adherents. Local Muslims joined with members of other religious groups to represent the Government at Interfaith Conferences on Religion in Indonesia in 2006 and in Cambodia in early 2008.

While animists generally experienced little interference from the Government in their religious practices, the Government actively discouraged animist practices that it deemed outdated, unhealthful, or illegal, such as the practice in some tribes of killing children born with defects or burying the bodies of deceased relatives underneath homes. In some areas where animism predominated among ethnic minority groups, local authorities have actively encouraged those groups to adopt Buddhism and abandon their beliefs in magic and spirits which the authorities considered "backward."

Persons arrested or convicted for religious offenses had little protection under the law. Detained persons may be held for lengthy periods without trial. Court judges, not juries, decided guilt or innocence in court cases, and the defense rights of the accused were limited. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practice their faith in an atmosphere in which application of the law is arbitrary. Certain actions interpreted by officials as threatening brought harsh punishment. Religious practice was "free" only if practitioners stayed within tacitly understood guidelines of activity acceptable to the Government.

The Government typically refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing on the part of its officials, even in egregious cases of religious persecution. Blame was often attributed to the victims rather than the persecuting officials. In some cases, officials continued to concoct patently unbelievable explanations for events in order to exonerate local officials. While the Government has sometimes admitted

that local officials are part of the problem, it has been unwilling to take action against officials who have violated laws and regulations on religious freedom.

Although the Government did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Holy See, representatives of the Papal Nuncio have visited from Thailand and coordinated with the Government on assistance programs, especially for lepers and persons with disabilities.

The Government requires and routinely granted permission for formal links with coreligionists in other countries. In practice the line between formal and informal links was blurred, and relations generally were established without much difficulty.

There was no religious instruction in public schools, nor were there any parochial or religiously affiliated schools. However, several private preschools and English-language schools received support from religious groups abroad. Many boys spent some time in Buddhist temples, where they received instruction in religion as well as academics. Temples traditionally have filled the role of schools and continued to play this role in smaller communities where formal education was limited or unavailable. Christian denominations, particularly the LEC and Seventh-day Adventists, operated Sunday schools for children and young persons. Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies conducted religious training for children as well as adult members. The Muslim community offered limited educational training for its children.

The Government generally did not interfere with citizens wishing to travel abroad for short-term religious training.

The Government observes the That Luang Festival and the Lao New Year, which have religious overtones, as national holidays. The Government generally allowed major religious festivals of all established congregations without hindrance, and government officials attended some Buddhist religious festivals in their official capacity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Throughout the country, religious practice was restrained by official rules and policies that allowed religious groups to practice their faith only under circumscribed conditions. However, the government structure is relatively decentralized, and central government control over provincial and district governments remained limited. As a result, the Government's tolerance of religion

varied by region and by religion. Local officials were often unaware of government policies on topics such as religious tolerance due to the incomplete dissemination and application of existing laws and regulations and, when aware of the laws, often failed to enforce them. The LFNC at times visited areas where religious persecution had taken place in order to instruct local officials on government policy and regulation. More often, however, the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department encouraged local or provincial governments to resolve conflicts on their own and in accordance with Decree 92.

Minority religious leaders saw an increasing need for training of provincial, district, and local officials to help them better understand Decree 92; some called for amending the Decree to make its language more clear and its enforcement more consistent.

Christian leaders in Luang Prabang Province reported as many as 10,000 adherents able to hold Sunday services in 48 locations: three homes converted for use as churches (although not formally registered), as well as 45 homes. In contrast, Luang Namtha provincial officials said their province had 480 Christians and were clear that provincial policy is to have Christians worship individually in their homes; Christians may request permission from village chiefs to worship as a group, but "none have done so" according to Luang Namtha officials. According to religious leaders, Luang Namtha does not allow outside Christian leaders to train in the province, nor can Christians officially travel outside the province for training.

Protestant groups that wanted to be recognized as separate from the LEC continued to be the targets of restrictions. However, in some areas unauthorized churches generally were allowed to conduct services without hindrance by local authorities. Within the LEC, some congregations sought greater independence and forged their own connections with Protestant groups abroad. Authorities in several provinces insisted that independent church congregations return to the LEC, but in other areas authorities allowed independent churches to conduct services without hindrance.

For a number of years Methodists have consistently sought to register with the LFNC as a separate denomination. In early 2006 some village and district officials appeared to be taking a stronger stance against unauthorized Methodist congregations; however, this reportedly tapered off in late 2006 and has appeared to occur less frequently since then.

Between 1999 and 2001 local authorities closed approximately 20 of Vientiane Province's 60 LEC churches. Beginning in 2002, most of these churches were allowed to reopen. However, officials in several districts of Savannakhet Province did not allow local congregations, despite requests, to reopen as many as 6 of the province's approximately 40 churches, and they remained closed at the end of the reporting period. Despite requests that a church building in Dong Nong Khun Village, which was confiscated by local officials in 2000, be returned to its congregation, provincial officials stated that the number of Protestants in the village was not sufficient to warrant having a church, even though local Protestants claimed more than 120 worshippers.

As many as 200 of the LEC's nearly 400 congregations did not have permanent church structures and conducted worship services in members' homes. Since the 2002 promulgation of Decree 92, officials from the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department have stated that home churches should be replaced with designated church structures whenever possible. However, most Christian communities have been unable to obtain permission to build new churches, even though group worship in homes is considered illegal by local authorities in many areas. Religious organization representatives pointed out that the building permit process begins at the local level and then requires provincial permission; they claimed the multiple layers of permission necessary were being used, beginning with local officials, to block the construction of new churches. No new LEC churches were permitted to officially register during the reporting period. In a few cases, villages allowed construction of new church buildings without prior official permission from higher level authorities; however, problems occurred when district or provincial officials became aware of the "illegal" construction. Home churches thus remained the only viable place of worship for many LEC congregations.

Baha'i spiritual assemblies in Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Champasak cities generally practiced without hindrance, and Baha'i groups faced fewer restrictions from local authorities than in the past. While cooperation from provincial-level authorities in Savannakhet Province was good, smaller Baha'i communities in Savannakhet Province continued to face restrictions by local police, including limitations on both the nature and extent of some religious activities.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of official interference with or denial of permission to hold religious celebrations in churches, but there were reports that Protestants in some villages were not allowed to hold Christian celebrations in their homes, thus restricting Protestant activities to church buildings only. This was particularly a problem for Protestants who had not been given

approval to build church structures in their villages. For example, Protestants in Nakun Village, Bolikhamsai Province, and Xunya Village, Luang Namtha Province, were reportedly restricted in their ability to hold religious meetings and celebrations in their homes. Protestants in both villages also were not given approval to build church structures.

Longstanding restrictions on the Catholic Church's operations in the north resulted in the continued existence of only a handful of small congregations in Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Bokeo, and Luang Namtha Provinces as well as some village communities in Vientiane Province. Catholics in these areas sporadically held services in homes. There were no ordained Catholic priests in the north, and pastoral visits from Vientiane were intermittent. However, there were signs during the reporting period that the Government was slowly easing its control over the Catholic community in the north. Several church properties, including a school in Vientiane Municipality, were seized by the Government after 1975 and have not been returned, nor has the Government provided restitution.

The Government strictly prohibited foreigners from proselytizing, although it permitted foreign NGOs with religious affiliations to work in the country. Although Decree 92 permits proselytizing by religious practitioners provided they obtain permission from the LFNC, the LFNC did not grant such permission, and persons found evangelizing risked harassment or arrest. In previous reporting periods, authorities arrested and expelled foreigners attempting to proselytize, but there were no reports of this during the reporting period.

The Government permitted the printing, import, and distribution of Buddhist religious material.

Although Decree 92 authorized the printing and importation of non-Buddhist religious texts and allowed religious materials to be imported from abroad, it also required permission for such activities from the LFNC. While in practice some groups were able to print their own religious materials, Baha'i and Christian groups faced challenges. The Government did not allow the printing of Bibles, and special permission was required for their importation for distribution. No Bibles were known to have been imported during the reporting period. Authorities seized religious tracts and teaching materials from Protestants entering the country from abroad, including at the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge, and fined those carrying the materials. However, there were no reports of arrests associated with these confiscations, as had occurred in previous years. Several non-Christian groups

indicated that they were not restricted in bringing religious materials into the country.

Identity cards did not specify religion, nor did family "household registers" or passports, two other important forms of identification. On occasion local officials withheld new government ID cards or household registration documents from Protestants and denied educational benefits to their children because of their religious beliefs or threatened to withhold official documentation unless they renounced their faith.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to arrest and detain persons for their religious activities, although this occurred less frequently than in previous reporting periods. Other persons were officially detained for reasons other than religion, although religion was considered to be a factor. Efforts by local officials to force Protestants to renounce their faith continued in certain areas. In some cases, officials threatened religious minorities with arrest or expulsion from their villages if they did not comply.

At the end of the reporting period, two known prisoners remained in custody primarily for religious reasons. In January 2007 Khamson Baccam, an ethnic Thai Dam man described as a Protestant leader, was arrested in Oudomsai Province. The Government was unwilling to acknowledge that he was being held, and multiple requests for information about his status remained unanswered. In 1999 authorities arrested two members of the Lao Evangelical Church in Oudomsai Province, Nyoht and Thongchanh, and charged them with treason and sedition, although their arrests appeared to have been for proselytizing. Nyoht was sentenced to 12 years in prison and died in prison in 2006. Thongchanh, whose 15 year sentence was reduced to 10 years at the end of 2006, remained in prison in Oudomsai at the end of the reporting period.

Most problems involving interference in religious practices occurred at the provincial, district, and local levels.

In March 2009 district officials banned Christians gathering to worship at a home in Nonsomboon village in Bolikhamsai Province, where an unapproved church had been destroyed. According to recent reports, local officials were allowing worship at homes to resume.

In August 2008 officials of Burikan District in Bolikhamsai Province reportedly banned approximately 150 members from gathering at a home in the village for worship services, declaring that services could be held only in a church building. Earlier in the reporting period, officials reportedly destroyed the group's church in Toongpankham village. The church had apparently been built with local permission, although it had not received provincial approval.

In July 2008 police authorities of Ad-Sapangthong District of Savannakhet Province reportedly interfered with worship by Christians in Boukham village and detained a pastor and four church members for two days; during this period they were reportedly held in foot stocks. The pastor was detained again in August along with two other church members; they were released in October. Reportedly 55 Christians were expelled from the village during this period. A senior Ministry of Public Security (MoPS) official explained that the pastor had moved to Boukham in 2005 but had failed to apply to change his household registration within six months as required; there was no confirmation of or explanation for the reported expulsion of church members by the MoPS official.

In July 2008 in Katan village, in Ta-Oy District, Salavan Province, a local Christian man died after local authorities reportedly forced him to drink alcohol; his relatives were reportedly fined after conducting a Christian burial service. A few days later local authorities reportedly detained 80 Christians from 17 families and forced them, apparently including by withholding food, to publicly renounce their faith. In September provincial and district authorities reportedly held a meeting in the village at the request of the central government in response to international inquiries about the situation. A senior government official stated that an investigation showed that the death was due to alcoholism and that the burial dispute arose from misunderstanding between Christian and non-Christian factions in the village. The official added that no individuals were forced to renounce their faith, although some may have done so voluntarily. However, according to later reports, some village residents wanted to redeclare their faith, but authorities refused to grant permission for them to do so.

There were a number of cases in which Christians were arrested for reasons other than religion, but in which religion may have played a factor.

In April 2009 the final two pastors from a group of eight Khmu pastors jailed in the Oudomsai provincial prison were reportedly released. In November 2008 six members of the group had been released from detention; each was ordered to pay \$350 (Kip 3,000,000) in detention costs. The group had been stopped, searched,

and all eight members arrested while attempting to cross the border from Bokeo Province into Thailand in March 2008. There was no indication that the group was trying to cross the border legally. Their situation was complicated when authorities found they were carrying documents critical of religious persecution in Laos.

In early 2009 8 heads of families from a group of 10 Hmong and Khmu Christian families were reportedly returned to Vietnam. According to this report, Lao authorities had ascertained that these heads of family had moved from Vietnam to Vang Vieng in northern Vientiane Province more than 7 years earlier and had been illegally living in Laos without documentation. Vang Vieng officials were said to have allowed these 10 local Hmong and Khmu Christian families to move from Vientiane Province to neighboring provinces after a February 2007 insurgent attack on an army camp near Vang Vieng that reportedly killed two Lao Army soldiers. However, the Vang Vieng officials had not provided the legal documents required for such a move and, after a short period, reportedly required the families to return to Vang Vieng. The male heads of family--seven Hmong and three Khmu--reportedly were then detained at Vientiane Province's Thong Harb Prison. Of the original 10 detainees, one reportedly died in late 2007 and another in May 2008. The other eight remained in Thong Harb Prison for more than a year before being deported.

In February 2008 authorities reportedly arrested 58 persons from 15 families during raids on Sai Jareun and Fai villages in Bokeo Province. Those arrested were described as Hmong Christians who had fled persecution in Vietnam possibly as early as 2002 and were apparently part of the Sai Jareun Village Christian congregation. Reports circulated that some or all of those arrested had been sentenced to prison or deported to Vietnam. One foreign organization claimed that nine Hmong church leaders from the area were sentenced to 15 years in prison on February 22, 2008, as a result of these raids. However, no local sources corroborated the report of imprisonments, and the Government denied that anyone from the area was sentenced to prison. One senior official confirmed that a number of persons were deported to Vietnam, but of those deported, there was no indication that any were in Laos legally. The same official described any deportations that had occurred as resulting from the investigation of an earlier clash between authorities and drug traffickers.

In July 2007, attacks by the authorities led to the deaths of 13 Hmong Christians and arrests of others from Bokeo's Sai Jareun Village, reportedly because of a perception of some possible connection to the dwindling but still ongoing

insurgency. Although the reports of the fighting appear accurate, the official government response was that those involved were actually trafficking illegal narcotics and resisted police attempts to arrest them. Bokeo Province, which borders both Burma and Thailand, is located on a major transit route for methamphetamine trafficking and thus hosts a concentration of law enforcement activity. Following the original incident, according to later reports, movement of persons within the area was highly restricted for some time, and many were jailed, including one Hmong church leader sentenced to 5 years in prison. Subsequent reports claimed that the church in Sai Jareun Village, which had numbered more than 1,000 members before this situation arose, had fewer than 30 in the aftermath of the crackdown.

In February 2007 Bolikhamsai Province officials indicated that two Buddhist monks had been arrested for being ordained without government approval and for celebrating inappropriately following the ordination ceremony. The two were reportedly detained only a short time before being released.

There were been a number of cases of officials pressuring Protestants to renounce their belief.

In July 2008 more than 500 Christians in villages in several villages in Luang Prabang Province, including Huay An in Jomphet District, reportedly came under pressure to deny their faith by judicial and police officials. The Christians were said to have been forced to turn in Bibles and hymnals that were then burned. However, according to one nongovernment source, no one was arrested and none had renounced their religion. The provincial LFNC office was given credit by religious leaders for stepping in to help resolve the situation in Jomphet District by calling local officials, including the police, to Luang Prabang city to review Decree 92 with them. The provincial LFNC office was also credited with resolving an earlier situation in Luang Prabang's Ngoy District in which seven Christians had been arrested in January 2008 and released 3 months later. Although Ngoy District continued to have problems, according to a provincial-level Christian leader, Christians in the other ten districts in Luang Prabang were generally free to worship.

There were also reports of incidents in four other provinces in July 2008. These included two Christian leaders arrested in Khongnoy village in Vieng Phukha District and another person arrested in Sing District, all in Luang Namtha Province. According to Luang Namtha officials, the problem in Khongnoy village was caused by a religious leader from neighboring Bokeo Province proselytizing in

Khongnoy village without permission; the officials denied that arrests had taken place in the case. They rejected reports that Christians had been forced to renounce their religion in Luang Namtha Province, saying that some persons had voluntarily given up Christianity when it led to conflicts within their families or when inducements to convert were not fulfilled. The Chief of Sing District denied that anyone had been arrested in July 2008.

Also in July 2008 there was a report that local officials pressed families in Attapeu Province to give up Christianity, although a visit by a provincial LFNC official was described as having resolved that situation. Officials reportedly put two persons in prison in Phongsali Province's Samphan City in an effort to force believers to renounce their faith. Other Christians were said to have been pressured to renounce their beliefs in Houaphan Province's Muang Aet District. In November 2008 seven families in Nam Reng village in Oudomsai Province were reportedly also pressured to renounce their faith; the six families refusing to sign a renunciation document were reportedly ordered out of the village. According to one report, they eventually moved to another village with a Christian community. At the end of the reporting period no further information was available, and Oudomsai provincial officials denied any knowledge of the case.

There were no reports of expulsions of Protestant families who in early 2007 had faced threats of expulsion from their villages if they did not renounce their beliefs.

There were no updates in four previously reported 2006 and 2007 cases of arrests and detentions of 18 Protestants for periods ranging from three weeks to six months or more. Three pastors, considered the leaders of a group of ethnic Khmu Protestants arrested in Khon Khen Village in November 2006, were jailed for approximately one year before they were released by the end of 2007.

Forced Religious Conversion

During the reporting period, local officials in some areas attempted to force Protestants to renounce their faith; however, there were no reports of successful forced religious conversion, including of any minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States. There were also no reports during this period of any minor U.S. citizens abducted or illegally removed from the United States.

In Xunya Village of Luang Namtha Province, where an original 45 Christian families, numbering more than 200 persons--mostly Yao, Khmu, and Hmong--

more than ten families have reportedly renounced their religion under pressure from the police during the last 2 years.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government's record of respect for religious freedom, particularly in regard to Protestant minorities, continued to be marred by problems at the local level, with incidents of persecution occurring in many provinces. However, some positive steps were taken during the reporting period to address specific religious freedom concerns.

In its official pronouncements in recent years, the Government called for conciliation and equality among religious groups. The LFNC continued to instruct local officials on religious tolerance and often sought to intervene in cases where minority religious practitioners, particularly Christians, had been harassed or mistreated.

Some areas where abuses were reported during the past 3 years experienced improvements. Conditions in Xunya Village of Luang Namtha Province have stabilized since 2007, when central-level LFNC officials apparently helped to ameliorate ongoing conditions of harassment by visiting Luang Namtha and issuing a document supporting the right of Christians in Xunya Village to worship. Although at least 10 families renounced their Christian faith in the area over the last 2 years, the situation was reported to be improving at the end of the reporting period--with LEC officials able to visit the village and village Christian families reportedly finally allowed to gather in small groups for worship.

In May 2007, the LFNC's director of religious affairs held a country-wide seminar that included attendance by 95 Vientiane and provincial-level representatives of all four approved religions to review religious rights granted under the Constitution and in the law and to discuss resolving religious and ethnic issues.

In July 2007, the LFNC held a second meeting for religious leaders and officials from Vientiane Municipality and Vientiane Province, including from the provincial, district, and local levels. Those attending were to take back lessons learned to be applied locally. Officials from the LFNC also traveled with representatives of the LEC to several provinces to promote better understanding between LEC congregations and local officials during the reporting period.

Leaders of an international NGO that has sponsored two major international conferences on "Religion and the Rule of Law" visited Vientiane in October 2008 and won government approval for the country to host a third iteration of this conference in Vientiane in late 2009 or early 2010. In June 2008 senior government and LFNC officials had participated in the NGO's second conference in Beijing, which examined key issues relating to freedom of religion. Government officials had attended the NGO's first conference on the same subject in Vietnam in 2007.

The Catholic Church reported a number of improvements over past reporting periods. An ordination of a Catholic priest in January 2009 in Khammouan Province continued to demonstrate a significant improvement from past restrictions. In February 2009 baptism of 710 new Catholics in Vientiane Province, some of whom had been waiting for as long as 15 years for permission to be baptized, was another significant step forward for the Catholic Church.

The Government also permitted the Bishop of Luang Prabang, who serves from Vientiane, to visit the north more frequently to conduct services for the scattered Catholic communities in Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Bokeo, and Luang Namtha, but it continued to restrict his travel and deny him residence in Luang Prabang.

Christian leaders cited overall progress toward religious freedom, remembering that Christmas services were not permitted as recently as 2006 in Vientiane Municipality. Progress was seen as spreading to the provinces. In December 2008 observers found encouraging the ability of the central LEC leadership to undertake training programs for provincial religious leaders and provincial government officials in Oudomsai and Luang Prabang provinces with support from both provincial governments. Training was held in Vientiane province at the Provincial and district levels, and preparations were underway to extend the training to the village level. By the end of the reporting period, observers also saw improvements in Phongsali Province, with LEC adherents able to travel to Vientiane for training and public baptisms. Luang Prabang Province, with a reported 10,000 Christians generally free to worship at 48 sites and with 10 of 11 districts regarded as generally problem-free at the end of the reporting period, was seen as setting a positive standard.

The LEC continued to conduct an active program of public service during this reporting period, providing developmental assistance and organizing social welfare projects in several areas that had previously experienced religious intolerance. In conjunction with the LFNC, the LEC continued to conduct meetings with officials

and Protestants in some villages where there had been religious tensions. Senior LEC leaders increased their contacts with the international religious community as the LEC became a full member of the World Council of Churches in 2008.

The Baha'i were increasing their training activities in Pakse city in Champasak Province. They were also working with the LFNC office in Thakhek city to reestablish links with Baha'i adherents believed to still live in villages in Khammouan Province, where there had been more than 1,000 believers from 200 families in the past. The Baha'i were also becoming more active in researching linkages in Oudomsai, Xiang Khouang, and Luang Prabang Provinces. In addition to being allowed to establish a new center in Bolikhamsai Province, the Baha'i gained their first adherents there from the Hmong minority group. The Baha'i also gained their first adherents in Salavan Province.

In early 2009 more than 100 Lao Baha'i leaders and adherents joined Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Thai counterparts in attending a regional Baha'i conference in Cambodia, one of 41 regional Baha'i conferences being held worldwide at the time.

In May 2008 one property in northern Vientiane Province, originally owned by Government but approved for Baha'i use, was officially deeded to the Baha'i. The Baha'i's request for the deed was supported by the LFNC.

Baha'i local spiritual assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly routinely held Baha'i 19-day feasts and celebrated all holy days without interference. The Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly in Vientiane met regularly and has sent delegations to the Universal House of Justice in Mount Carmel, in Haifa, Israel. LFNC officials have also visited the Baha'i center in Haifa.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The various religious communities generally coexist amicably. Society places importance on harmonious relations, and the dominant Buddhist faith generally is tolerant of other religious practices. Local cultural mores generally instilled respect for longstanding, well-known differences in belief. However, interreligious tensions arose on some occasions within some minority ethnic groups, particularly in response to proselytizing or disagreements over rights to village resources. Efforts of some congregations to establish churches independent of the LEC or associated with denominations based abroad led to some tensions within the Protestant community. Frictions also arose over the refusal of some

members of minority religious groups, particularly Protestants, to participate in Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Religious freedom is a key priority of the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane. Embassy officers regularly discussed religious freedom with a range of Lao Government officials.

The Embassy maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Religious Affairs Department of the LFNC. The Embassy informed the LFNC of specific cases of arrest or harassment. The LFNC in turn used this information to intercede with local officials. Embassy representatives met with a range of leaders of all religious groups in the country during the reporting period. Despite an environment restricted by government-owned and -controlled media, Embassy officials actively encouraged religious freedom.

The Embassy actively encouraged high-level visits as the most effective tool for eliciting greater respect for religious freedom from the Government. The Embassy also regularly posted on its website material relevant to religious freedom in the country. A specialist from the Office of International Religious Freedom visited the country twice during the reporting period and encouraged greater religious freedom while meeting with senior government officials at the central, provincial, and district levels. The Embassy strongly supported the successful invitation by leaders of an international NGO for Laos to host an international conference on "Religion and the Rule of Law" in Vientiane in late 2009 or early 2010.

LATVIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period; however, bureaucratic problems persisted for some minority religious groups.

There were at least two reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; lingering suspicions remained toward newer, "nontraditional" religious groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 25,000 square miles and a population of 2.2 million. The largest religious groups and their percentages of the population include: Roman Catholic (22 percent), Lutheran (20 percent), and Orthodox Christian (16 percent). Sizeable religious minorities include Baptists, Pentecostals, and evangelical Protestant groups. The once large Jewish community was virtually destroyed in the Holocaust during the 1941-44 German occupation. In 2008, according to official sources, 10,139 persons identified themselves as ethnically Jewish.

As of April 2009, approximately 1,200 congregations were registered with the Government. These included Lutheran congregations (301), Catholic (250), Orthodox Christian (119), Baptist (92), Old Believer Orthodox (70), Seventh-day Adventist (51), Muslim (17), Jehovah's Witnesses (14), Methodist (13), Jewish (12), Hare Krishna (11), Buddhist (4), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4), and 194 other congregations.

Interest in religion increased markedly following the restoration of independence; however, many adherents do not regularly practice their faith. In 2008 religious groups provided the following estimates of membership in congregations to the Justice Ministry: Catholics (500,000), Lutherans (435,000), Orthodox Christians

(370,000), Baptists (7,062), Seventh-day Adventists (3,950), Old Believer Orthodox (2,607), Mormons (494), Methodists (635), Muslims (332), Jews (586), Jehovah's Witnesses (176), Hare Krishnas (124), and Buddhists (100). Orthodox Christians, many of whom are Russian-speaking, noncitizen permanent residents, are concentrated in the major cities, while many Catholics live in the east.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, bureaucratic problems persisted for some minority religious groups. There is no state religion, however, the Government distinguishes between "traditional" -- Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Old Believers, Baptist, Methodist, Adventist, and Jewish -- and "new" religious groups. In practice this has resulted in increased bureaucratic regulations and requirements for new religious groups not applicable to traditional ones.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas. For several years the Orthodox Church has been seeking official recognition for Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as observed according to the Orthodox Church's calendar, but the Government had not adopted this proposal by the end of the reporting period.

The Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox churches have their own seminaries. The University of Latvia's theological faculty is nondenominational.

The Ecclesiastical Council (EC) comments on religious issues for the Government. The EC is an advisory body organized in 2002 and chaired by the sitting prime minister. It includes representatives from major religious groups: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Baptist, Adventist, Old Believers, Methodist, and Jewish. The EC met during the reporting period to discuss issues including amendments to the Law on Religious Organizations and proposals for ethical standards in public media. Only traditional organizations are represented on the Ecclesiastical Council, limiting the input of other religious organizations into government decisions on religious matters.

In December 2008 the Board on Religious Affairs and the New Religions Consultative Council were disbanded. Their functions were taken over by the Ministry of Justice, which cited increased efficiency and cost savings as the reasons for the change.

Under current law traditional religious groups enjoy certain rights and privileges that nontraditional ones do not. The Government has been seeking to define in law the relations between the state and the traditional religious groups. Parliament adopted laws during the reporting period that regulate relations between the state and the Lutheran and Russian Orthodox Churches. Laws had already been established for Baptist, Old Believer Orthodox, Jewish, Methodist, and Adventist organizations.

Although the Government does not require the registration of religious groups, the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations accords religious organizations certain rights and privileges if they register, such as status as a separate legal entity for owning property or for financial transactions, as well as tax benefits for donors. Registration also eases the rules for holding public gatherings.

According to the 1995 law, any 20 citizens or other persons over the age of 18 who have been recorded in the population register may apply to register a religious group. Asylum seekers, foreign staff of diplomatic missions, and those in the country temporarily in a special status may not. Congregations that do not belong to a registered religious association must reregister each year for 10 years. Ten or more congregations of the same denomination and with permanent registration status may form a religious association. Only groups with religious association status may establish theological schools or monasteries. The decision to register a group is made by the Ministry of Justice with technical review by the Enterprise Register.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Law on Religious Organizations does not permit simultaneous registration of more than one religious association (church) in a single confession. The law on the Russian Orthodox Church in particular prevents other churches from registering with the word "orthodox" in their names.

One request for registration, from a Scientologist organization, was denied during the reporting period. The Ministry of Justice concluded that the practice of Scientology included elements of medicine, and therefore it could not be registered as a religious organization.

Visa regulations require foreign religious workers to present either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a local bachelor's degree in theology and letters of invitation. The process remained cumbersome, although the Government generally was cooperative in helping to resolve difficult visa cases in favor of missionaries.

The law stipulates that foreign missionaries may hold meetings and proselytize only if invited by domestic religious organizations to conduct such activities. Foreign religious denominations criticized this provision.

The Law on Religious Organizations and other laws stipulate that only representatives of traditional Christian churches (i.e., Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox Christian, Old Believer, Baptist, Methodist, and Adventist) and Jewish groups may teach religion in public schools to public school students who volunteer to take the classes. The Government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on a voluntary basis on the religion "characteristic of the national minority." Other denominations and religious groups that do not have their own state-supported minority schools may provide religious education only in private schools.

A private Jewish school in Riga, Ohel Menachem Chabad Day School, has petitioned the Ministry of Education for several years not to schedule compulsory national exams on the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, which often falls during the exam period. In contrast to the previous year, the exams did not coincide with Shavuot in 2009. The Ministry promised in a letter to the school to provide an alternative test date for Jewish students on the nearest available date for any future exams that would conflict with Shavuot, but it did not make any policy changes to avoid the scheduling conflict in future years.

Property restitution had been substantially completed, although most religious groups -- including the Lutheran, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish communities -- continued to wait for the return of some properties. The status of these remaining properties was the subject of complicated legal and bureaucratic processes

concerning ambiguous ownership, competing claims, and the destruction of the Jewish communities to whom properties belonged before World War II. The Jewish community expressed concern about the terms under which some properties were restored.

During the reporting period, the Government and Jewish community continued to consider a legislative solution to outstanding claims on communal property and heirless private property last owned by members of the Jewish community that could not be regained earlier under the denationalization laws, since there were no identifiable heirs to the property. In September 2008 the Government convened a task force to study the issue of communal property, but the group had not issued any recommendations or begun discussions with the Jewish community by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were at least two reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period. Both cases involved attacks against religious groups on the Internet -- one against Catholics and the other against Jews.

Ecumenism continued to be a relatively new concept in the country, and traditional religious groups have adopted a distinctly reserved attitude toward the concept. Although government officials encouraged a broader understanding and acceptance of newer religious groups, many citizens remained suspicious of such groups.

Anti-Semitic sentiments persisted in some segments of society, manifested in occasional public comments and resistance to laws and memorials designed to foster Holocaust remembrance. In contrast to prior years, there were no acts of vandalism of Jewish memorials or cemeteries. However, books and other publications appearing in the country that address the World War II period

generally dwelt on the effects of the Soviet and Nazi occupations on the country and on ethnic Latvians, sometimes at the expense of comment on the Holocaust or some citizens' role in it.

In 2008 there were 10 officially registered cases of ethnic incitement. Law enforcement institutions do not collect or publish data specifically on hate crimes (there is no definition of hate crimes in the country's laws), but there is a law against "incitement of ethnic, racial, or religious hatred." For 2008, of the 10 cases, none involved Jews. Of the four cases in 2009 through May, one was connected with Jews. In this case, the defendant was accused of posting hateful comments on the Internet against Jews, Russians, and homosexuals.

There is also a separate law against incitement of hatred against religious groups. During the reporting period, there was one registered case, which involved distribution on the Internet of anti-Catholic messages.

Of 16 hate crime cases in 2007, only one was connected with Jews -- a hate speech case which involved hostile comments about Jews and Roma. Anti-Semitic literature was sold openly at a bookstore in Riga, despite the law banning incitement of ethnic hatred.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Embassy worked to support religious freedom by engaging in regular exchanges with the President, the Prime Minister, and appropriate government bodies, human rights nongovernmental organizations, and representatives of various religious confessions, including missionaries.

LEBANON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice all religious rites, provided that the public order is not disturbed. The Constitution declares equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference but establishes a balance of power among the major religious groups. The Government generally respected religious rights; however, there were some restrictions, and the constitutional provision for apportioning political offices according to religious affiliation may be viewed as discriminatory.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. At the same time, the Government took some steps to improve religious freedom, including the Ministry of Interior's February 11, 2009 circular, allowing citizens to remove their religious affiliations encoded on national identity cards.

There were periodic reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There was tension among religious groups, attributable to competition for political power, and citizens continued to struggle along sectarian lines with the legacy of a 15-year civil war (1975-90). Despite tensions generated by the competition for political power, places of worship of every confession continued to exist side by side, extending a centuries-long national heritage as a place of refuge for those fleeing religious intolerance.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,035 square miles and a population of 4 million. Because parity among confessional groups remains a sensitive issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932. However, the most recent demographic study conducted by Statistics Lebanon, a Beirut-based research firm, showed 28 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 28 percent Shi'a Muslim, 21.5 percent Maronite Christian, 8 percent Greek Orthodox, 5 percent Druze, and 4 percent Greek Catholic. Over the past 60 years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims, mostly due to emigration of large numbers of Maronite Christians and a higher than average birth rate among the

Muslim population. There are also very small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Mormons, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Of the 18 officially recognized religious groups, 4 are Muslim, 12 Christian, 1 Druze, and 1 Jewish. The main branches of Islam practiced are Shi'a and Sunni. The Alawites and the Isma'ili ("Sevener") Shi'a order are the smallest Muslim communities. The Maronite community, the largest Christian group, has had a centuries-long affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church but has its own patriarch, liturgy, and ecclesiastical customs. The second largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church, principally composed of ethnic Arabs who maintain a Greek-language liturgy. Other Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites), Syriac Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts, Evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists), and Latins (Roman Catholic). The Druze, who refer to themselves as al-Muwahhideen, or "believers in one God," are concentrated in the rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. Divisions and rivalries among various groups date back many centuries, and while relationships among religious adherents of different confessions were generally amicable, group identity was highly significant in most aspects of cultural interaction.

Many persons fleeing religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighboring states have immigrated to the country, including Kurds, Shi'a, and Chaldeans from Iraq, as well as Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan. According to the Secretary General of the Syriac League, 50,000 Iraqis have immigrated to Lebanon since 2003, and approximately 5,000 Coptic Christians live in Lebanon.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice all religious rites, provided that public order is not disturbed. The Constitution requires the state to respect all religious groups and denominations and guarantees respect for the personal status and religious interests of persons of every religious sect. The Constitution declares equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference, but stipulates a balance of power distributed among the major religious groups. The Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, there were some restrictions, and the constitutional provision

for apportioning political offices according to religious affiliation may be viewed as inherently discriminatory.

In most cases, the Government permits recognized religious groups to administer their own family and personal status laws, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. The "Twelver" Shi'a, Sunni, Christian, and Druze confessions have state-appointed, government-subsidized clerical courts that administer family and personal status law. However, many of these laws discriminate against women. For example, Sunni inheritance law provides a son twice the inheritance of a daughter. Although Muslim men may divorce easily, Muslim women may do so only with the concurrence of their husbands.

The Constitution provides that Christians and Muslims be represented equally in Parliament, the Cabinet, and high-level civil service positions, which include the ministry ranks of Secretary General and Director General. It also provides that these posts be distributed proportionally among the recognized religious groups. The constitutional provision for the distribution of political power and positions according to the principle of religious representation is designed to prevent a single confessional group from gaining a dominant position. The "National Pact" of 1943 stipulates that the president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament be Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi'a Muslim, respectively. This distribution of political power operates at both the national and local levels of government.

The 1989 Ta'if Agreement, which ended the country's 15-year civil war, reaffirms this arrangement but, significantly, mandates increased Muslim representation in Parliament so that it is equal to that of the Christian community and reduces the power of the Maronite Christian presidency. In addition, the Ta'if Agreement endorses the constitutional provision of appointing most senior government officials according to religious affiliation. This practice functions in all three branches of government. The Ta'if Agreement also stipulates a cabinet with power equally allocated between Muslims and Christians. The political establishment has been reluctant to change this "confessional" system, because citizens perceive it as critical to the country's stability.

Formal recognition by the Government is a legal requirement for religious groups to conduct most religious activities. A group that seeks official recognition must submit a statement of its doctrine and moral principles for government review to ensure that such principles do not contradict popular values or the Constitution. The group must ensure that the number of its adherents is sufficient to maintain its continuity.

Alternatively, religious groups may apply for recognition through recognized religious groups. Official recognition conveys certain benefits, such as tax-exempt status and the right to apply the religion's codes to personal status matters. An individual may change religions if the head of the religious group the person wishes to join approves of this change. Refusal is not reported to occur in practice. Religion is generally encoded on national identity cards and noted on *ikhraaj qaid* (official registry) documents, and the Government complies with requests of citizens to change their civil records to reflect their new religious status.

Some religious groups do not enjoy official recognition, such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and unregistered Protestant Christian groups. These groups are disadvantaged under the law in that their members do not qualify for certain government positions, but they are permitted to perform their religious rites freely. For example, a Baha'i cannot run for Parliament as a Baha'i candidate because there is no seat allocated for the confession, nor could such an individual hold senior positions in the Government, since these are also allocated on a confessional basis. However, a number of members of unregistered religious groups are recorded in government records under recognized religions. For example, most Baha'is are registered under the Shi'a sect. A member of the Baha'i community can therefore run for office and fill a seat allocated to the Shi'a sect. Similarly, Mormons are registered under the Greek Orthodox faith. Government decisions on granting official recognition of religious groups do not appear to be arbitrary.

Government documents refer to Jewish Lebanese citizens as Israelis, even though they are not Israeli citizens. In April 2009 Interior Minister Ziad Baroud submitted a proposal to the cabinet to amend legislation by referring to "Jewish Lebanese" citizens instead of "Israelis."

Unrecognized groups may own property and assemble for worship without government interference; however, they are disadvantaged under the law because legally they may not marry, divorce, or inherit property in the country. Therefore, these religious groups may choose to register as part of other known religious organizations. For example, Protestant evangelical churches are required to register with the Evangelical Synod, a nongovernmental advisory group that represents those churches with the Government. It is self-governing and oversees religious matters for Protestant congregations. Representatives of some churches complained that the Synod has refused to accept new Protestant groups into its membership since 1975, thereby crippling their clergy's ability to minister to the members of those communities.

Many families have relatives who belong to different religious communities, and intermarriage is not uncommon; however, intermarriage is difficult to arrange in practice between members of some groups. Shari'a, which applies to personal status matters of Muslims, forbids the marriage of a non-Muslim man to a Muslim woman. Druze religious leaders will perform marriages only of Druze couples. There are no procedures for civil marriage; however, the Government recognizes civil marriage ceremonies performed outside the country.

There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes of the clerical establishment strongly discourage such activity.

The leadership councils for Christians and Druze nominate candidates for their respective senior clerical posts. However, the nomination of Sunni and Shi'a muftis is officially endorsed by the Government's Council of Ministers, and they receive monthly salaries from the Government. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of Muslim and Druze ecclesiastical judges. The leaders of other religious groups, such as Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholics, do not receive salaries from the Government.

The Government does not require citizens' religious affiliations to be indicated on their passports. Following the Ministry of Interior's February 11, 2009 circular, citizens are not required to have their religious affiliation encoded on national identity cards or ikhraaj qaid documents, and citizens were able to remove their religious affiliation from their civil registry records during the reporting period. The ikhraaj qaid, a civil document that indicates personal status information, can be presented by citizens instead of an identity card when they apply for various purposes, such as to obtain government employment or to enroll in or be employed at a university.

Article 473 of the Penal Code stipulates a maximum prison term of one year for anyone convicted of "blaspheming God publicly." There were no prosecutions reported under this law during the reporting period.

The Government permits the publication in different languages of religious materials of every registered religious group.

The Government recognizes the following holy days as national holidays: Armenian Christmas, Eid al-Adha, St. Maroun Day, Islamic New Year, Ashura, Good Friday, Easter (both Western and Eastern rites), the birth of the Prophet

Muhammad, All Saints' Day, Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas. The Government also excuses Armenian public sector employees from work on St. Vartan Day.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The 1989 Ta'if Agreement calls for the eventual elimination of political sectarianism in favor of "expertise and competence"; however, little progress has been made in this regard. Representatives from the lesser represented, or "minority," Christian groups, such as Syriac Christians, stated that the Government discriminated against them because no one from their religious classifications has been appointed a minister. While they have served in some high-level civil service positions, such as Director General, these groups state that most positions are filled by Maronites and Greek Orthodox. These groups further stated that while their population numbers 54,000, they are allocated only one representative in Parliament.

Religious workers not working under the auspices of a government-registered religious organization and found to be working while on tourist visas are deemed to have violated their visa status and are consequently deported.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no confirmed reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On February 11, 2009, the Minister of Interior issued a circular allowing citizens to remove their confessional identity from their civil registry records if they wish to do so. Citizens were able to remove their religious affiliation from their civil registry records during the reporting period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were periodic reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Following the July-August 2006 conflict with Israel and continuing throughout the year, tensions between the democratically elected government of Fouad Siniora and the antigovernment opposition led by Hizballah resulted in greater political tension among religious groups. While this political climate contributed to periodic reports of tension and occasional confrontations between religious groups during the reporting period, most of this activity could be attributed to political differences and the legacy of the civil war.

During the reporting period, Hizballah directed strong rhetoric against Israel and its Jewish population. Moreover, anti-Semitic literature was published and distributed with the cooperation of Hizballah. Media outlets such as Al-Manar TV, which is controlled and operated by Hizballah, and NBN TV, which is affiliated with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, broadcast anti-Semitic material and drew no government response.

Representatives from the Israeli Communal Council, the legally registered Jewish organization, reported continued acts of vandalism committed against a Jewish-owned cemetery in downtown Beirut.

During the reporting period, there were examples of Maronite religious leaders attempting to prevent evangelical Christians from proselytizing to other Christians and Druze religious figures hindering Maronite missionary efforts.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government actively promotes religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy advances this goal through contacts at all levels of society, public remarks, embassy public diplomacy programs, and the funding of relevant projects. The Ambassador and embassy officers met regularly with leaders of religious communities and regularly discussed matters related to religious freedom and tolerance. The U.S. Government supports the principles of the Ta'if Agreement, and embassy staff regularly discuss the issue of sectarianism with political, religious, and civic leaders.

LESOTHO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 11,720 square miles and a population of 1.9 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. The Christian Council of Lesotho, a nongovernmental organization made up of representatives of all major Christian churches in the country, estimates that 90 percent of the population is Christian. Roman Catholics represent 45 percent of the population, Lesotho Evangelicals 27 percent, Anglicans 9 percent, and other Christian groups such as the Seventh-day Adventist, American Methodist Episcopal, Dutch Reformed, Lesotho Methodist, and Pentecostal churches together constitute 9 percent. Members of indigenous religious groups make up approximately 10 percent of the population. There are an estimated 1,000 Muslim families, 150 Hindu families, and 800 members of the Baha'i faith. Muslim and Hindu numbers have declined significantly in recent years due to emigration to South Africa. There are a small number of Jews, but no practicing Jewish community.

While Christians can be found throughout the country, Muslims live primarily in Butha-Buthe, Leribe, and Berea districts, which are situated in the north. Many Christians practice traditional cultural beliefs and rituals in conjunction with Christianity.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

The Government has no established requirements for religious group recognition. Any registered religious group may apply for a waiver of taxes on charitable donations from outside the country; however, in practice few, if any, waivers are given. Under the Societies Act, any group may register with the Government, regardless of the purpose of the organization. The only requirements are a constitution and a leadership committee. Unregistered groups are not eligible for any government benefits, such as duty-free import permits for donated items or tax deductions on donated funds. There are no penalties for not registering, and it is common for informal church groups not to register.

The Ministry of Education pays and certifies all teachers and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and parochial schools. The Catholic Church operates an estimated 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Evangelical Church, the Anglican Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodist Church also have schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

During the reporting period the Government allocated prime real estate for the Muslim community to build a mosque and other facilities, ending years of bureaucratic delays.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Mutual respect between Christians and Muslims was the norm; various ecumenical efforts promoted cooperation on social matters.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

LIBERIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,000 square miles and a population of 3.5 million. According to the 2008 National Population and Housing Census, Christians represent 85.5 percent of the population, Muslims 12.2 percent, adherents of indigenous religious beliefs 0.5 percent, and other religions 0.1 percent, with 1.5 percent claiming no religion. There are also small percentages of Baha'is, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. Many religious groups incorporate elements of indigenous religious beliefs. Christian groups include Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion denominations, and a variety of Pentecostal churches. Many of the churches are affiliated with churches outside the country, while others are independent.

Christians live throughout the country. Muslims belong mainly to the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. Mandingos reside throughout the country, while Vais live predominantly in the west. Ethnic groups in all regions participate in the indigenous religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Government ceremonies open and close with prayers and may include the singing of hymns. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian but occasionally are both Christian and Muslim.

The Government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays. Some Muslim leaders felt that certain Islamic holy days should also be national holidays. The Government mandates that public businesses and markets, including Muslim businesses and shops, remain closed on Sundays and major Christian holy days, an issue that Muslim leaders in the past brought to the Legislative Assembly and the Supreme Court to no avail. There is no legal requirement to excuse Muslims from employment or classes for Friday prayers, although some employers do so.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization. Registration is routine, and there were no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory. The Government does not require indigenous religious groups to register, and they generally do not do so.

Public schools offer religious education, particularly Christian education, but do not require it. The Government subsidizes private schools, most of which are affiliated with either Christian or Muslim organizations.

High-level government officials were required to take oaths when assuming their new offices. Christians kissed the Bible and Muslims the Qur'an on those occasions.

There were reports of ritualistic killings, the act of killing for body parts for use in traditional rituals, from all parts of the country. The Government treated ritualistic killing cases as homicides and investigated and prosecuted them accordingly.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Despite frequent interaction among Christians and Muslims, some tension existed. The Inter-Religious Council promoted dialogue among various religious communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other embassy officers expressed support for religious freedom and pluralism at interfaith meetings.

LIBYA

The country does not have a constitution, and there is no explicit legal provision for religious freedom. However, a basis for some degree of religious freedom is provided in the Great Green Charter on Human Rights of the Jamahiriya Era, and the Government generally respects the right to observe one's religion freely in practice. The Government tolerates most minority religions but strongly opposes militant forms of Islam, which it views as a security threat, and prohibits the proselytizing of Muslims. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. On April 21, 2009, the Government reportedly released several citizen converts to Christianity after allegedly holding them in detention without charges for three months and subjecting them to physical abuse. The Government continued to regulate religious life actively and at times restricted religious activities seen as having a political dimension or motivation.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Following the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the country on May 31, 2006, the U.S. Government continued to normalize bilateral relations and foster a multifaceted relationship with the Government, including discussion of religious freedom as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 703,816 square miles and a citizen population of 5.8 million. Ninety-seven percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Small Christian communities consist almost exclusively of sub-Saharan migrants and a small number of American and European expatriate workers. Two bishops--one in Tripoli, one in Benghazi--lead an estimated 50,000 Coptic Christians, most members of the estimated 750,000 Egyptian expatriate population. Roman Catholic clergy operate in larger cities, working primarily in hospitals, orphanages, and with the elderly or physically impaired. A priest in Tripoli and a bishop resident in Cairo lead the Anglican community. A Greek Orthodox archbishop resident in Tripoli and a priest in Tripoli and Benghazi serve 80 regular Orthodox churchgoers. The Ukrainian Embassy in Tripoli also maintains a small Orthodox

church for Tripoli's Russian-speaking population. There are Unitarian churches in Tripoli and Benghazi as well as small Unitarian congregations scattered throughout the country. An evangelical Protestant church in Tripoli serves a population of primarily African migrant workers. While the country historically has no Shi'a community, there were reports that small numbers of Iraqi Shi'a fleeing sectarian tensions in Iraq immigrated during the reporting period. There is no known Jewish community.

Numerous Christian groups meet for worship in Tripoli, including hundreds of African migrant Protestants and Roman Catholics. Coptic clergy report large congregations consisting largely of expatriate Egyptian laborers. Between 100 and 200 Anglicans, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, and an estimated 80 Orthodox Christians, including members of the Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Russian communities, attend weekly Friday services.

Approximately 1.5 to 2 million foreigners reside in the country, most of whom originated in neighboring Arab countries and sub-Saharan Africa, with smaller numbers from South and Southeast Asia. Virtually all non-Sunni Muslims are foreigners. While there was no information on the number of foreign missionaries, the Government criminalizes the proselytizing of Muslims and therefore forbids missionary activity aimed at citizens. Government claims that all citizens are "by definition" Sunni Muslim, coupled with broad prohibitions on any sort of independent political association, prevent citizens from identifying themselves as members of any religious or political group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the country has neither a constitution nor any law explicitly providing for religious freedom, in practice the Government generally respected the right to freely observe one's religion. A basis for some degree of religious freedom is provided in the Great Green Charter on Human Rights of the Jamahiriya Era, dated December 6, 1988, which states: "The members of Jamahiriya Society...proclaim that religion is absolute faith in the Divinity, and that it is a sacred spiritual value. Religion is personal to each one and common to all. It is a direct relationship with the Creator, without any intermediary. Jamahiriya Society proscribes the monopoly of religion as well as its exploitation for purposes of subversion, fanaticism, sectarianism, partisan spirit, and fratricidal wars."

There is no law expressly guaranteeing an individual's right to choose or change his or her religion or to study, discuss, or promulgate one's religious beliefs. Citizens have no obvious recourse if they believe their rights to religious freedom have been violated. In practice, citizens did not have access to courts to seek damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation.

Islam is the equivalent of a state religion and thoroughly integrated into everyday political and social life. As with all other aspects of individuals' lives, the Government closely monitors and regulates Islam to ensure religious life includes no political dimension. The Government strongly opposes religious extremism or militant Islam, which it views as a threat to the Qadhafi regime. Monitoring of mosques and a widespread culture of self-censorship generally ensure both clerics and adherents stay within well-established lines of acceptable practice. Even mosques endowed by prominent families generally must conform to the government-approved interpretation of Islam. The Government also maintains control over religious literature, including Islamic literature. There is no civil law prohibiting conversion from Islam to another religion; however, the Government prohibits the proselytism of Muslims and actively prosecutes offenders.

The World Islamic Call Society (WICS) is the official conduit for the state-approved form of Islam. With an emphasis on activities outside the country, it operates a state-run university for moderate Muslim clerics from outside the Arab world. To date, WICS has trained 5,000 students in Islamic thought, literature, and history. Upon graduation, the Government encourages students to return home and promote its interpretation of Islamic thought in their own countries. Beyond its role in education, WICS serves as the religious arm of Qadhafi's foreign policy and maintains relations on behalf of the Government with the country's minority religious communities. A state-run religious endowments (auqaf) authority administers mosques, supervises clerics, and has primary responsibility for ensuring that all religious practices within the country conform to the state-approved form of Islam.

The Government routinely granted visas and residence papers to religious staff from other countries. At least one Christian clergy member was removed from the country during the year. The minister, a Nigerian national, was reportedly in the country without a valid visa.

Religious instruction in Islam is required in public schools, but there is no in-depth instruction in other religions. The Government does not issue information on the

religious affiliation of children in public schools, and there were no reports of children transferring to private schools for alternative religious instruction.

The country adheres to traditional Islamic law, which states that a non-Muslim woman who marries a Muslim man is not required to convert to Islam, although many do so; however, a non-Muslim man must convert to marry a Muslim woman.

In order to perform the Hajj, citizens must be at least 40 years old.

The Government observes the Islamic holy days of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and the Islamic New Year as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government limited the number of places of worship allowed for each Christian denomination to one per city.

The Government continued to ban the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order.

The Government maintains an extensive security apparatus that includes police and military units, multiple intelligence services, local revolutionary committees, and people's committees. The resulting pervasive surveillance system monitors and controls many aspects of the lives of individuals, including their religious activities. While the Government does not single out religious activity for special scrutiny, it actively monitors peaceful religious practices for evidence of political motivations or dimensions. So long as religious groups avoid political activity, they encounter little harassment.

The Government prohibits meaningful independent association and forbids group activities inconsistent with principles of the 1969 revolution; as a result, the Government authorizes religious associations and lay groups only after confirming that the groups' activities are in line with regime policy. The Government applies these restrictions uniformly to all religious groups.

Members of minority religious groups, primarily Christians, encountered minimal restrictions conducting worship. The Unitarian Church of Tripoli continues to face difficulties obtaining compensation for property confiscated by the Government in 1971.

There were no known places of worship for members of other non-Muslim religions such as Hinduism, the Baha'ism, and Buddhism, although adherents are allowed to practice in their homes. Foreign adherents of these religions are allowed to display and sell religious items at bazaars and other gatherings.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In May 2009, the authorities released Daniel Baidoo, a Ghanaian national, after he spent eight years in prison. According to press reports, Baidoo had been imprisoned for proselytizing after receiving Christian Biblical tracts at a local post office.

On April 21, 2009, the Government reportedly released several citizen converts to Christianity after allegedly detaining them for three months without charge, according to International Christian Concern (ICC). ICC reported in March 2009 that the converts from Islam were held incommunicado in Tripoli in a State Security prison where they were allegedly interrogated, abused, and pressured to reveal the names of other converts. Two weeks before their release, the converts were reportedly transferred to a Reform and Rehabilitation Prison where some family members were permitted to visit them.

According to Tripoli-based relief workers, some sub-Saharan African detainees claim to have been imprisoned for proselytizing or holding Christian beliefs. It is difficult to determine the veracity of those claims as many are arrested and held with other migrants during periodic round-ups of undocumented foreigners.

There continued to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the Government and advocate the establishment of an Islamic government that would enforce a more conservative form of Islam.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the year, prominent representatives from the Government and society made new efforts to promote religious coexistence and harmony. Saif al-Islam al-

Qadhafi, the son of Muammar al-Qadhafi, met with representatives of the Catholic Church to celebrate the Easter holiday and to discuss increasing the number of Catholic nuns working in the country's healthcare facilities.

During the reporting period, minority religious communities achieved several symbolic milestones within the context of the country's increasing openness to the international community. The Greek Orthodox Metropolitan visited the eastern city of Benghazi in late 2008. In January 2009, the Archbishop of Canterbury made his first visit to Tripoli, where he led services at the Anglican Church's historic premises in the city center. Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi was instrumental in returning the 19th-century building--which had been used as an art gallery--to its original purpose.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In May 2006, the U.S. Government upgraded its diplomatic representation in the country from a liaison office to an embassy. In June 2006, the Secretary of State rescinded the country's designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism, and in January 2009, the United States and the country exchanged ambassadors for the first time in 32 years. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy maintains regular contact with various religious denominations in the country consistent with its efforts to promote human rights and religious freedom.

LIECHTENSTEIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, the Government took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 61.7 square miles and a population of 35,400. According to the 2000 census, membership in religious denominations was as follows: 78.4 percent Roman Catholic, 8.3 percent Protestant, 4.5 percent Muslim, 1.1 percent Orthodox Christian, 0.1 percent Jewish, 0.4 percent other religious groups, 2.8 percent professed no formal creed, and 4.1 percent of residents did not indicate religious affiliation in the census.

The Muslim community has grown over the last two decades as a result of an influx of migrants primarily from Turkey, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, many of whom resettled from other Western European countries. According to official census statistics, the Muslim population increased from 689 in 1990 to 1,593 in 2000.

A government-contracted survey of 600 residents published in April 2008 found that 40 percent of the population participated in formal religious services at least once a month. Muslims were the most active religious group--44 percent attend religious service at least once a week, compared to 23 percent of Catholics and 24 percent of other Christians.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Criminal Code prohibits any form of discrimination or debasement of any religion or its adherents. The Constitution makes the Catholic Church the "National Church" of the country, and as such it enjoys the full protection of the state.

Funding for religious institutions comes from municipalities and from the general budget, as decided by Parliament, and is not a direct "tithe" paid by citizens. The Government gives money not only to the Catholic Church but also to other denominations. Catholic and Protestant churches receive regular annual contributions from the Government in proportion to membership as determined in the census of 2000; smaller religious groups are eligible to apply for grants for associations of foreigners or specific projects. The Government reported that it was prepared to make state contributions to support the Muslim community on condition that the two main representative bodies (the Islamische Gemeinschaft and the Tuerkischer Verein) form an umbrella organization that could use the funds equitably for all Muslims residing in the country. The Government reported that both bodies favored such a countrywide organization but had not succeeded in forming one. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

In December 2008, in the context of Liechtenstein's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe's (COE) Commissioner for Human Rights reiterated its 2005 recommendation that the Government "...ensure that minority religious communities are not discriminated against on procedural or other grounds when state subsidies are allocated to religious communities."

The Government observes Epiphany, Candlemas/Groundhog Day, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Ascension, Whit Sunday, Whit Monday, The Nativity of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day as national holidays. Assumption Day (August 15) is celebrated as National Day. Sunday is a public holiday; shops remain closed and Sunday work is generally not allowed.

To receive a religious worker visa, an applicant must demonstrate that the host organization in Liechtenstein is important for the entire country. An applicant must have completed theological studies and be accredited by an acknowledged religious group. Visa requests for religious workers were normally not denied and were processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals.

The Government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam, plus one short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The Government routinely grants visas to the imams in exchange for the agreement of the Turkish Association and the Muslim community not to allow sermons that incite violence or advocate intolerance.

Religious education is part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic or Protestant religious education is compulsory in all primary schools, but the authorities routinely granted exemptions for children whose parents requested them. The curriculum for Catholic confessional education is determined by the Roman Catholic Church with only a minor complementary supervisory role by the municipalities, with the exception of Balzers, Triesen, and Planken, which have stronger governmental supervision.

At the secondary school level, parents and pupils choose between traditional confessional education organized by their religious community and the nonconfessional subject "Religion and Culture." Since its introduction in 2003, 90 percent of Catholic pupils have chosen the new subject. Representatives of the Protestant community complained that the optional subject "Religion and Culture" in effect eliminated classes in Protestant doctrine because it made it virtually impossible for the minority community to meet the quorum of four students to hold confessional classes as part of the regular curriculum. As an alternative, Protestant churches offer religious education classes at the churches outside of regular school hours with financial support from the Government.

In the 2007-2008 school year, the Government for the first time introduced Islamic education classes in public primary schools, in five municipalities. Approximately 70 pupils enrolled. The Government required that instructors have both pedagogical and subject training and that classes be held in German. The Institute for Interreligious Pedagogics and Didactics in Cologne, Germany developed the curriculum, and the Department of Education supervised instruction. Previously, Muslim parents could send their children only to a mosque for religious instruction. This pilot project was expected to continue and, after an evaluation, officials planned to integrate it into the regular curriculum.

Since 2004, the Government has maintained a working group for the better integration of Muslims into society, consisting of representatives and officials who deal with Islamic issues. The working group's objectives are to counter mutual prejudices and promote respect and tolerance on the basis of dialogue and mutual understanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, Catholics, Protestants, and members of other religious groups work well together on an ecumenical basis. Differences among religious groups are not a significant source of tension in society.

The Government's Equal Opportunity Office is charged with handling complaints of religious discrimination, but during the reporting period the office received no such complaints.

In its third country report released in April 2008, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted it had received reports of instances of verbal and physical abuse against Muslims, particularly women wearing headscarves. ECRI also expressed concern about instances of alleged racial discrimination in access to employment and housing, primarily against Muslims from Turkey and the Balkans. The report also recorded complaints of Muslim community leaders about the lack of an adequate mosque and Islamic cemetery, as well as about difficulties in finding suitable premises for their cultural activities.

The Government maintained that its working group on Islamic integration has dealt intensively with the issue of a cemetery, but that the Muslim members of the group had not always treated the issue as a priority.

A government-contracted study on religious attitudes and practices released in April 2008, which surveyed 600 of the country's residents, found that majority attitudes towards religious groups are largely characterized by tolerance. However, approximately 30 percent of respondents harbored negative views of Muslims, and 17 percent expressed critical views of Jews.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts against persons or property. The Jewish community is too small to have an organizational structure.

On January 27, 2009, the Government held a special memorial hour to commemorate the Holocaust. The Government called on the population to commemorate the historic date and presented the Day of Remembrance as part of the Government's efforts to fight racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Since 2003, secondary schools have held discussion forums on the Holocaust on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy and the Office of Foreign Affairs conduct annual discussions of religious freedom issues in preparation for this report.

LITHUANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were reports of acts of vandalism of Jewish and other cemeteries, anti-Semitic comments, particularly on the Internet, and intolerance. The President and political leadership usually, but not always, criticized such offenses and anti-Semitic acts when they occurred.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy promoted religious freedom and tolerance through various media and public speaking events.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 25,174 square miles and a population of 3.33 million.

The Government recognizes nine "traditional" religious groups: Latin Rite Catholics (Roman Catholics), Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Churchgoers, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites.

Roman Catholicism remains dominant and influential. A 2007 poll commissioned by the Ministry of Justice indicated that 80.2 percent of respondents are Roman Catholics. The Eastern Orthodox Church, the second largest religious group, has 140,000 members (approximately 4 percent of the population), living mainly along the border with Belarus. There are 27,000 Old Believers, Russian Orthodox practitioners who do not accept the church's reforms in the 17th century. There are an estimated 20,000 Lutherans, primarily in the southwest. The Evangelical Reformed community has 7,000 members, with concentrations in Vilnius and the eastern town of Birzai. The Jewish community numbers 4,000. Almost 75 percent of the country's Jews live in Vilnius. The majority of local Jews are secular, and only an estimated 1,200 belong to one of the eight Jewish communities. The Sunni

Muslim community has 2,700 members. The Greek Catholic community has an estimated 300 members.

The Karaites have been in the country since 1397. Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Some consider Karaites to be a branch of Judaism; their religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament. The Government recognizes the Karaites as a distinct ethnic group. Two houses of worship, one in Vilnius and one in nearby Trakai, serve the Karaite religious community of approximately 250 members. The Karaites' only religious leader is also their community president.

Fewer than 5 percent of the population belongs to what the Government refers to as "nontraditional" religious communities. The most numerous of these are the Full Gospel Word of Faith Movement, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the New Apostolic Church. A total of 1,074 "traditional" and 180 "nontraditional" religious associations, centers, and communities have officially registered with the State Registrar of Legal Entities.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 26 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution provides that a person's freedom to profess and propagate his or her religion or faith "may be subject only to those limitations prescribed by law and only when such restrictions are necessary to protect the safety of society, public order, a person's health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."

The Criminal Code contains three provisions to protect religious freedom. The code prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for punishment of up to two years' imprisonment. Interference with religious ceremonies is punishable with imprisonment or community service. Inciting religious hatred is punishable by imprisonment for up to three years, and legal entities can be prosecuted for violations under this article.

It is unlawful to make use of the religious teachings of churches and other religious organizations, their religious activities, and their houses of prayer for purposes that contradict the Constitution or the law. The Government may also temporarily

restrict freedom of expression of religious conviction during a period of martial law or a state of emergency. The Government has never invoked these laws.

There is no state religion; however, under the 1995 Law on Religious Communities and Associations, some religious groups enjoy benefits not available to others, including government funding, the right to teach religion in public schools, and the right to register marriages. The Law on Religious Communities and Associations enables all registered religious groups to own property for prayer houses, homes, and other uses and permits construction of facilities necessary for their activities.

The law divides registered religious communities into state-recognized "traditional" religious communities, other state-recognized religious groups, and all other registered communities and associations. The Constitution recognizes "traditional" churches and religious organizations, as well as other churches and religious organizations, provided that they have a basis in society and their teachings and rituals do not contravene morality or the law.

Government authorities acknowledge as traditional only those religious groups that can trace their presence in the country back at least 300 years. The law enumerates nine traditional religious communities: Latin Rite Catholics (Roman Catholics), Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Churchgoers, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites.

"Traditional" religious communities and associations may register marriages, establish subsidiary institutions, establish joint private/public schools, provide religious instruction in public schools, and be eligible to receive government assistance. Their highest religious leaders are eligible to apply for diplomatic passports, their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and they may provide military chaplains. The Ministry of Justice does not require traditional religious communities and associations to register their bylaws. Traditional religious communities do not have to pay social and health insurance taxes for clergy and other employees, and they are not subject to a value-added tax on basic utilities.

The law stipulates that the Government may grant state recognition to "nontraditional" religious communities that have societal support and have been registered in the country for at least 25 years. Nontraditional religious communities must apply to the Ministry of Justice and provide a description of their religious teachings and a founding statement signed by no fewer than 15

members who are adult citizens. The Ministry must review the documents within six months and make a recommendation to Parliament on final approval.

The Evangelical Baptists, one of 11 Baptist groups in the country, and the Seventh-day Adventists are the only state-recognized nontraditional religious groups. In practice they receive some privileges from the Government, but not to the extent that traditional religious groups do. They are entitled to perform marriages and do not have to pay social security and health care taxes for clergy and other employees. However, unlike traditional communities, the Evangelical Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists are not eligible for annual subsidies from the Government, they do not receive the exemption from the value-added tax on utilities, and their clergy and theological students are not exempt from military service.

The Ministry of Justice's Religious Affairs Department is responsible for processing initial registration applications, but the State Registrar of Legal Entities, under the national Registry Center, manages the database of registered religious communities. Religious communities can file applications at local registration centers throughout the country. Registration centers forward new applications to the Religious Affairs Department and process renewal registrations locally. New communities affiliated with traditional religious groups register for free, while nontraditional communities pay a registration fee of \$42 (107 litas). At the end of the reporting period, a total of 1,076 traditional and 180 nontraditional religious associations, centers, and communities had officially registered with the State Register of Legal Entities.

Religious communities must register to obtain official status, which is a prerequisite for opening a bank account, owning property, or acting in a legal or official capacity as a community. Unregistered communities have no legal status or state privileges. However, there were no reports that the Government prevented any such groups from worshiping or seeking new members.

While only traditional religious communities receive annual state subsidies, nontraditional groups are eligible for government support for their cultural and social projects.

Following the restoration of the country's independence, the Government began returning religious communities' property confiscated by Nazi and Soviet occupiers. The law grants all religious communities equal opportunity to reacquire property once used for religious services. The Government successfully resolved a number of claims by religious communities for restitution, mostly in the early and

mid-1990s. Some claims were pending at the end of the reporting period. The return of Jewish communal property has been particularly slow and contentious. The Jewish community, working with the World Jewish Restitution Organization, has developed a list of properties that have been documented as being part of the Jewish community holdings at the start of World War II. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not introduced the legislation necessary to effect the return of these properties to the Jewish community.

No single government agency handles all religious issues. A department in the Ministry of Justice adjudicates religious groups' requests for registration; the State Registrar of Legal Entities, part of the national Registry Center, manages the database of registered religious communities; and the Prime Minister's staff includes an advisor on religious issues. The Prime Minister also has several unpaid advisors on various topics concerning the Jewish community and Holocaust issues.

The Office of the Equal Opportunities (OEO) Ombudsperson is authorized to adjudicate complaints about state institutions, educational institutions, employment, and product and service sellers and producers that discriminate on the basis of religion.

The Parliament Ombudsperson examines whether state authorities properly perform their duty to serve the population. The law on the Parliament Ombudsperson specifically notes religious beliefs in defining the purview of the office. The OEO and the Parliament Ombudspersons have the authority to investigate complaints, recommend changes to parliamentary committees and ministries regarding legislation, and recommend cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for pretrial investigation if warranted.

While there is some overlap between the two offices, the OEO Ombudsperson appears to have greater authority to hear complaints of individual acts of religious discrimination.

The Journalist Ethics Inspectorate has the authority to investigate complaints under Article 20 of the Law on Provision of Information to the Public, which bars publishing material that "instigates war, national, racial, religious, social and gender hatred." It has the authority to levy administrative fines on newspapers under administrative law or refer cases to law enforcement authorities for criminal prosecution.

In 2000 the Government and the Holy See agreed to allow the Catholic Church to provide religious support to Roman Catholic members of the military through chaplains. In 2002 the Ministry of Defense and the Roman Catholic Church signed an agreement on chaplains' activities. During the reporting period, there were 16 Catholic chaplains providing services to the military. Other traditional churches and religious groups provide similar support. The chaplaincy may ask the Ministry of Defense to provide support for religious services for other religious groups based on need or requests from service members. The Ministry of Defense provides material support and places of worship.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Assumption Day (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas (December 25 and 26).

Conscientious objectors may petition for alternative military service within military structures, but there is no option for alternative nonmilitary service, despite requests by members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Persons enrolled in alternative military service receive noncombat assignments but must follow military regulations and reside on military installations.

The Constitution establishes public educational institutions as secular. The Law on Education permits and funds public school religious instruction only for traditional and other state-recognized religious groups. In practice parents can choose either religious instruction or secular ethics classes for their children. Schools decide which of the traditional religious groups will be represented in their curriculums on the basis of requests from parents for children up to age 14 (after age 14, the student decides). During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science received no complaints about any school not providing requested religious instruction.

The number of wholly private religious schools is relatively low. There were approximately 30 schools with ties to Catholic and Jewish groups, although students of different religious groups often attended these schools. All accredited private schools (religious and nonreligious) receive funding from the Ministry of Education and Science through a voucher system based on the number of pupils; private Roman Catholic schools receive additional funds from the Government to cover operational costs. This system covers program but not capital costs of school operation. Founders generally bear responsibility for covering capital outlays; however, the Ministry provides funding for capital costs of traditional religious private schools where an international agreement to do so exists.

In 2008 public schools provided religious education to students from the following religious groups: 248,927 Roman Catholics; 3,199 Russian Orthodox; 638 Evangelical Lutherans; 638 Evangelical Reformed Lutherans; 272 Jews; 74 Greek Catholics; 15 Old Believers; and six Muslims. A total of 211,471 students studied ethics.

The interministerial Commission to Coordinate Activities of Governmental Institutions that Deal with Issues of Religious, Esoteric, and Spiritualist Groups coordinates investigations of religious groups if there is a concern that actions of a group or actions affecting a group may not be in line with the principles of a democratic society, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The Minister of Justice appoints the chairperson of the Commission, which includes representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Education, Health, Foreign Affairs, the General Prosecutor's Office, and the State Security Department. No religious groups have membership on the Commission. The Government established the Commission in 2000 following some parliamentarians' calls for increased control of "sects." The Commission decides what issues to examine based on concerns in general public discussions or concerns raised by government or parliamentary officials. The Commission has never concluded that particular groups were sects or taken actions to limit a religious group's activities. The Commission was not approached with any problems or issues related to actions of religious, esoteric, or spiritualist groups at governmental institutions during the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

While registered nontraditional religious communities can act as legal entities, they do not receive regular subsidies, tax exemptions--except for certain social security and health care contributions, social benefits, or exemptions from military service enjoyed by traditional communities. In 2008 the Government allocated \$3,271,000 (8,604,000 litas) to traditional religious communities for capital costs associated with houses of worship, schools, and other facilities. No other religious communities received this type of support, but funds from municipal or other government sources may be available for their use.

The state additionally funds social security and health care contributions for spiritual leaders and other employees of traditional and other state-recognized religious communities. Other religious communities must pay for these benefits on behalf of their spiritual leaders.

Three applications for status as a "state-recognized religious association" were pending: from the New Apostolic Church (applied in 2003), Pentecostals (Evangelical Belief Christian Union) (applied in 2002), and United Methodist Church of Lithuania (applied in 2001). In 2005 the Ministry of Justice recommended to the Parliament that the Seventh-day Adventist Church be granted the status of a state-recognized religious association. On July 16, 2008, the Parliament granted the Seventh-day Adventists the status of an official religious community.

During the reporting period, the OEO Ombudsperson received six complaints related to religious discrimination but found all of them to be groundless.

During 2008 the Parliament Ombudsperson received one complaint from the Evangelical Reformed Church related to restriction of activities of the religious community. The Ombudsman continued to investigate at the end of the reporting period.

After years of negotiating with local and international Jewish groups concerning communal property restitution, the Government in late June 2009 was close to submitting to the Parliament a compensation bill that would, over 10 years beginning in 2012, pay the Jewish community approximately 30 percent of the value of communal buildings seized during the Nazi and Soviet occupations of the country. The bill did not specify to what entity the approximately \$53 million (128 million litas) would be paid. The Parliament was expected to address the issue in the autumn.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On April 20, 2009, an Israeli company received a delivery of lumber from Lithuania that had been defaced with drawings of swastikas and a long-nosed figure. The supplier said that the racist gesture was the work of a local employee at the factory in Lithuania; he apologized and promised to fire the employee and send a formal letter of apology. On April 21, Lithuania's Charge d'Affaires to Israel met with the head of the Israeli company and expressed regret for the vandalism. She also said that the Lithuanian Government "has no tolerance for and condemns anti-Semitic acts."

On April 20, 2009, the birth date of Adolph Hitler, a huge red banner with a swastika appeared on a wall of an abandoned house in Klaipeda. Firemen removed the banner. City police were investigating the case at the end of the reporting period.

On March 8, 2009, the Roman Catholic Bernadine cemetery in Vilnius was vandalized. Police started an investigation, but no suspects were identified during the reporting period.

Three acts of vandalism (on December 31, 2008, January 13, 2009, and February 2, 2009) were committed in a Lutheran cemetery in the northern city of Mazeikiai. Vandals damaged an estimated 40 tombs, including those of persons of Russian and Latvian origin. Police began an investigation.

On September 23, 2008, unknown suspects burned an Israeli flag outside the Jewish Community Center of Klaipeda. Police were investigating the incident at the end of the reporting period.

On August 27, 2008, vandals painted "Juden Raus" ("Get rid of the Jews") and swastikas on the wall of the Jewish community center in Klaipeda. On January 19, 2009, "Kill Jews," "Palestine," and swastikas were painted on the same community center.

On August 10, 2008, the Jewish community centers in Vilnius and Panevezys were vandalized with anti-Semitic symbols and language. Police immediately began an investigation, which was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. On August 11, the President and the Prime Minister condemned the vandalism.

On August 3, 2008, intoxicated juveniles vandalized a Lutheran cemetery in Joniskis.

On August 2, 2008, a Tatar cemetery was vandalized in Alytus. Police identified three 15- to 17- year- old suspects. Their investigation continued at the end of the reporting period.

On May 13, 2008, in the forest near the small town of Varnikai in the Trakai region, a wooden monument to victims of the Holocaust was burned down. Police began an investigation but found no suspects during the reporting period. The monument commemorated the 1,446 Jews in the village, 597 children among them, who were killed in 1941. On May 21, 2008, the Prime Minister visited the site and condemned the destruction of the monument. The Government allocated approximately \$6,000 (15,000 Litas) to rebuild the monument; it was rebuilt in June 2009.

Throughout the reporting period, anti-Semitic comments were written on unscreened Internet blogs and in unscreened Internet news portals' comments sections. The number of hate speech investigations opened by prosecutors continued to increase. During 2008 the Prosecutor's Office opened investigations involving 99 allegations of instigation of hate (including over the Internet), and one for discrimination, compared to 39 in 2007. As in the previous years, prosecutors speculated that the increase in hate speech was fueled by the ability to use the Internet anonymously. Through May 2009 prosecutors had started 22 investigations.

As of the end of the reporting period, international and local Jewish communities were still concerned about a historically significant Jewish cemetery in Vilnius. The cemetery became a prominent issue in 2005 when international Jewish groups expressed concern over the construction of a commercial/residential complex on and near the grounds of the cemetery. Russian colonial authorities closed the cemetery in the 19th century and constructed fortifications on part of the land. The Soviets subsequently destroyed visible vestiges of the cemetery, disturbing some graves and constructing a sports complex on part of the site.

Research to determine the definitive boundaries of the cemetery has been inconclusive. Although the Government has granted the cemetery cultural heritage status, that designation did not include the ground under the Soviet-era sports arena or the recently built commercial/residential complex. The Government, the Jewish communities, and the developer who controls much of the site continued during the

reporting period to attempt to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. In May 2009 the Government unilaterally provided protection for nearly the entire cemetery site; at the end of the reporting period, the Government was working with the Jewish communities and the developer on final regulations concerning areas near the cemetery borders. No construction work has been observed at the site since July 2008.

On September 22, 2008, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court upheld a 2007 decision of the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission that fined the director of the music television channel MTV Lithuania \$1,180 (3,000 litas) for broadcasting the program Popetown. In December 2006 a complaint was filed with the OEO Ombudsperson that alleged the television channel "defamed and debased" the Roman Catholic religion. Also in December the Lithuanian Bishops' Council tried but failed to stop the broadcast of the program through a legal suit. The Journalist Ethics Inspectorate and the Lithuanian Journalists and Publishers Ethics Commission issued statements condemning the broadcast. The official condemnations, however, did not fault MTV Lithuania for religious hatred but for broadcasting the program too early in the evening when children could watch it.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained a regular dialogue on religious issues with senior officials in the Government, parliamentarians, religious leaders, and concerned nongovernmental groups. Religious groups used the Embassy as a vehicle to voice their complaints, and the Embassy encouraged religious leaders to share their views and concerns on the status of religious freedom.

LUXEMBOURG

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 999 square miles and a population of 460,000. The country is historically Roman Catholic, and Catholicism remains the predominant faith. According to a 1979 law, the Government may not collect or maintain statistics on religious affiliation; however, the Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that more than 90 percent of the population is Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist churches are the largest Protestant denominations; Anglicans are also present. The local press estimates that there are 9,000 Muslims; 5,000 Orthodox Christians (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian); and 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. There is a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) community, established in 2000, in Dommeldange.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion; however, based on the Concordat of 1801, some churches receive financial support from the state. The Constitution specifically provides for state payment of salaries and pensions of clergy of those religious groups that sign

conventions (agreements) negotiated with the Government. The following religious groups receive such support: Catholic; Greek, Russian, Romanian, and Serbian Orthodox; Anglican; the Reformed Protestant Church of Luxembourg; the Protestant Church of Luxembourg; and Jewish congregations.

The Government chose a dual-track approach on approval of a Muslim Convention law and its implementing statutes, incorporating statutes proposed by the Islamic Center Councils, and also a parliamentary bill on a Muslim Convention. In January 2008 four of the five Islamic Center Councils approved statutes and submitted them to Parliament. In 2007 Parliament had taken up a bill on a Muslim convention. At the same time, the "Shuura," an 11-member committee representing the Muslim community, submitted its proposed statutes--detailing the procedural operations of the Muslim community, including the selection of the mufti and imams--to the country's five Islamic Center Councils for approval.

It was not known when Parliament would resume action on the Convention. During the previous reporting period, the Government drafted a convention approved by the Cabinet and submitted it to the "Shuura" for its consideration.

The Muslim community first submitted an application for financial support from the Government approximately one decade ago, although it was not until late 2003 that the Muslim community named a national representative and single interlocutor that would allow discussions on its convention to proceed. However, in 2008 this interlocutor resigned for personal reasons. He was not replaced, and the convention process slowed.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Shrove Monday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Christmas, and the second day of Christmas.

There is a long tradition of religious education in public schools. A 1997 convention between the Minister of National Education and the Catholic archbishop governs religious instruction. In accordance with this convention, religious instruction is a local matter, coordinated at the communal level (there are 116 communes which regulate local affairs) between representatives of the Catholic Church and communal authorities. There are government-salaried religious instructors at all levels of public school. Parents and pupils may choose between instruction in Catholicism or an ethics course. Schools grant exemption from this instruction on an individual basis. Approximately 81 percent of primary school pupils and 57 percent of high school students choose religious instruction.

The Government subsidizes all public schools and also private religious schools whose religious group has signed a convention with the state. The Government also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

In 2006 the country's education initiative to provide religious and moral instruction for students in their last year of coursework received favorable notice in the European Union's Report on Discrimination and Islamophobia. The initiative was begun as a pilot program in 2004 in one high school, which remains the only school in the program, and focuses on interfaith dialogue and explains the basic religious precepts of non-Christian religions. This program was developed in consultation with the Catholic Church and Muslim community, among others. Although originally scheduled to be made universal in high schools for final year students in 2009, at the end of the reporting period that was no longer expected to occur.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government does not maintain a list of "sects," and the only distinction made is between religious groups that receive financial funding from the Government and those that do not.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim groups coexist amicably. Differences among religious groups were not a significant source of tension in society.

Although the Jewish community reported no serious concern about anti-Semitism, community leaders indicated there was occasional conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, with criticism of Israel and Israeli policies directed toward the community even when the connection was not valid.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers meet with representatives of government ministries at the working level to discuss matters related to religious freedom. During the reporting period, they also met with representatives from religious groups and nongovernmental organizations, none of whom voiced any concern over the state of religious freedom in the country.

MACAU

The Basic Law, which serves as the Constitution of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR), provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The region has an area of 11 square miles and, according to official statistics in 2006, a population of 560,000. Buddhism, which is practiced by nearly 80 percent of the population, is the predominant religion. Approximately 4 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and more than 1 percent is Protestant. Smaller religious groups include Baha'is (estimated at 2,500 persons); Muslims (estimated at 100 persons); and a small number of Falun Gong practitioners.

There are approximately 40 Buddhist temples, 30 Taoist temples, 18 Catholic and approximately 70 Protestant churches, 4 Baha'i centers, and 1 mosque. Approximately 50 percent of primary and secondary students were enrolled in schools operated or funded by religious organizations. These schools may lawfully provide religious education, but the Government does not maintain statistics on this subject.

Many Protestant denominations are represented, including Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches. Evangelical denominations and independent local churches also exist in the region. The Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) enrolled students in virtual seminary programs.

As of December 2006, an estimated 70 Protestant churches with 10,000 members conducted services in Chinese; approximately 5,000 worshippers attend every

Sunday. An estimated 500 Protestants attended services conducted in foreign languages.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 34 of the Basic Law states that "Macau residents shall have freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach and to conduct and participate in religious activities in public." Furthermore, Article 128 stipulates, "the Government, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or in the efforts of religious organizations and their believers to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the SAR."

The 1998 Freedom of Religion and Worship Law, which remained in effect after the 1999 transfer of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC), provides for freedom of religion, privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The Government generally respected these rights in practice.

The Freedom of Religion and Worship Law allows religious organizations to register directly with the Identification Bureau, which is required under the law to receive and process registrations. Applicants need to supply their name, identification card number, contact information, organization name, and copy of the group's charter to register. Religious entities can apply to media organizations and companies to use mass media (television, radio, etc.) to preach, and such applications are generally approved. Registration is not required to conduct religious activities, and registration does not automatically confer tax-exempt status or other advantages.

The Freedom of Religion and Worship Law stipulates that religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church, which is in communion with the Vatican, recognizes the Pope as the head of the Church. In 2005 the Holy See appointed the current Bishop for the diocese. Beginning in September 2007 the Macau Inter-University Institute (IIUM), affiliated with the Catholic University in Portugal, offered a Christian studies course that involved Catholic seminary students from the mainland. According to IIUM's website, the Chief Executive of the SAR, Edmund Ho, specifically

requested that the school implement a study program to prepare candidates for the Catholic ministry in the region.

Many religious groups, including Catholics, Buddhists, Protestants, and Baha'is, provide extensive social welfare services to the community. The Government provides financial support for the establishment of schools, childcare centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers run by religious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Under the Basic Law, the government of the Macau SAR (not the Government of the PRC) governs religious practices in the region. Religious organizations coordinate their relations with coreligionists in mainland China through the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO), which is staffed by PRC officials. CGLO has been supportive of these activities and exchanges. CGLO also maintains dialogue with religious organizations in the SAR.

Falun Gong is not registered with the Identification Bureau. While the Bureau has not issued instructions regarding Falun Gong, senior officials have stated that Falun Gong practitioners may continue their legal activities despite the lack of registration. According to Falun Gong practitioners, they were able to practice their daily exercises in public parks, although in the past they have reported being watched and checked for identification by police. Falun Gong representatives, however, have claimed that they were denied entry into the region, especially during sensitive political periods. Falun Gong practitioners reportedly have not been granted permission to use public spaces for their informational displays, and when they have posted them without authorization, police fined them.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the region.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Relations among the various religious communities were good, and citizens generally were tolerant of the religious views and practices of others. Public ceremonies and dedications often included prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officers from the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong met regularly with leaders of all religious groups and spiritual organizations in the region.

MACEDONIA

The Constitution and the 2007 Law on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Communities, and Religious Groups provide for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, the lack of effective implementation of the registration portion of the 2007 legal status law severely hindered new registrants' ability to acquire legal standing.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. embassy officials advocated for effective and fair implementation of registration provisions of the 2007 legal status law.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 9,781 square miles and a population of 2.1 million. The country's two major religions are Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Approximately 65 percent of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, and 32 percent is Muslim. Other religious groups include Roman Catholics, various Protestant denominations, and Jews.

There is a general correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation--the majority of Orthodox believers are ethnic Macedonian, and the majority of Muslim believers are ethnic Albanian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and the 2007 Law on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Communities, and Religious Groups provide for freedom of religion; other laws and policies also contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The 2007 law entered into force in May 2008 and liberalized the regime for registering religious groups, allowing for the registration of more than one group from each religious confession.

There is no official state religion, but five religious groups are mentioned specifically in a 2001 amendment to the Constitution: the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC), the Islamic Community in Macedonia, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Community, and the Evangelical Methodist Church. Prior to the adoption of the amendment, the Constitution mentioned only the Macedonian Orthodox Church "and other religious communities and groups." State support for construction of places of worship favors the dominant Macedonian Orthodox Church.

The Government observes Orthodox Easter and Christmas and Ramazan Bajram (end of Ramadan) as national holidays. Other Christian, Islamic, and Jewish holidays are not national holidays, but they are government-designated religious holidays for adherents of those faiths.

The law calls for religious groups to register in order to acquire status as legal entities and states that all (registered) groups are separate from the state and equal before the law. The law details a checklist of application materials for new registrants and a process for carry-over of registrations of groups registered under previous laws by the end of 1998.

Foreigners entering the country to carry out religious work or perform religious rites must obtain approval from the State Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups to receive visas. When applying for visas, such persons must submit a letter of invitation from representatives of a registered religious organization in the country to the Commission, which then issues a letter of approval to be submitted with the visa request. The Commission reported that its review process takes less than a week; there were no complaints from religious groups that the process took longer than that.

Private religious primary schools are not allowed under the law, but there are no restrictions on private religious schools at secondary levels and above, or on religious education that takes place in religious spaces such as churches and mosques. The Ministry of Education began a program of religious education for primary school students in the sixth grade during the 2008-09 school year, with students' parents choosing between a single-faith religious doctrinal course and a

secular course on history of religions. On April 15, 2009, the Constitutional Court ruled that the single-faith religious courses were inconsistent with the Constitution's separation of church and state. The Ministry of Education complied with the decision and stopped the single-faith courses. The Constitutional Court's decision allowed the history of religions course to continue through the end of the school year. At the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Education announced plans to develop a course entitled "Ethics of Religion" for the 2009-10 school year, asking students/parents to choose between history of religions and ethics of religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. However, failure to effectively implement new registration procedures for religious groups blocked their ability to gain legal status.

In May 2008 Skopje Court II assumed responsibility for registering religious groups under the 2007 law. The law also sets out clear timelines for the Court to complete the registration process--15 days for review of completeness of applications and an additional eight days for entering the group into the register. The law requires that the name and official insignia of new groups be different from the names and insignia of already-registered groups, but it allows multiple groups of a single faith to register. Skopje Court II assigned the registration process to a single judge, who did not meet the timelines required by the law, leaving many applicants waiting months without information. A number of applicants believed the application guidelines were confusing after they received decisions from the court rejecting their applications for reasons not clearly set out in the law's checklist, including requiring Macedonian citizenship of the group's "Responsible Person," and requiring that the group's articles of incorporation be dated after the entry-into-force of the new law. The judge in charge and the president of the court also stated that they would seek to ensure that sources of teaching and liturgy for new registrants are different from those of existing registrants, seemingly intending to protect the autonomy of already-registered groups and contrary to the spirit of the law.

During the reporting period, the court approved two new applicants--Christian Church Word of Hope and the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement--and rejected or did not act on applications from 11 religious communities--the Bektashi Community of Macedonia in Tetovo, Christian Church Annunciation, Christian Church Oasis, Christian Movement New Hope, Church of the True Orthodox

Christians in Macedonia, Evangelical Baptist Church, Ehlibejtska Bektashi Community of Macedonia, Free Evangelical Church Good News, Greek Orthodox Archbishopric of the Patriarch of Pec (application name for Jovan Vraniskovski's church, formerly called the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid, since the MOC has added "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" to its registered name), Kaderiska Religious Group Jenet, and Stavropegic Monastery St. John Hrysostom.

Some restrictions related to its status as an unregistered group continued to be applied to the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid," which denies the MOC's self-declared autocephaly (also not recognized by other Orthodox churches). Led by a defrocked MOC bishop, Jovan Vraniskovski, this group is recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church as an archbishopric. Members of the group claimed undue government monitoring or harassment based on their religious beliefs. On July 23, 2008, and February 9-10, 2009, church members reported delays at border crossings into the country and indicated that border guards told them they should take off their monastic clothes in order to facilitate border crossing.

State support for construction of houses of worship and other religious buildings favored the dominant Orthodox religious community. Despite protests by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and student organizations opposing its construction for both city planning and church/state separation reasons, groundbreaking for a state-funded Orthodox church on the main city square in Skopje (agreed to in a closed-door government meeting in January 2008) was scheduled to take place in June 2009. The dispute peaked in a March 28, 2009, clash between protestors opposed to and those in favor of its construction. However, plans for the groundbreaking were not delayed until the Ministry of Culture failed to approve a contract for its construction, stating that the single bid exceeded cost expectations. Late in June 2009, the Government announced that it would transfer the user rights for the land and project documentation from the Ministry of Culture to the MOC. NGOs opposed to the construction announced plans to challenge the land transfer in court. In contrast, the reconstruction of the Charsia Mosque in the city of Tetovo (funding for which was agreed to by the Government in a meeting a week after the decision to fund the Orthodox church) had not begun at the end of the reporting period, and appeals from a coalition of NGOs to allow reconstruction of the Burmali Mosque on the Skopje city square were unanswered.

Churches and mosques are often built without building permits, but the Government normally does not take action against religious groups that convert existing structures for religious use. However, by the end of the reporting period,

the Administrative Court had not acted on a 2007 case filed by Jehovah's Witnesses related to the ownership and use as a meeting hall of a property near the northeastern town of Kriva Palanka.

The problem of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav government was not fully resolved. Several religious communities have not regained full ownership of many of the properties expropriated by the communist regime. Ownership of almost all churches and many mosques has been restored to the appropriate religious communities but not for most other properties. Restitution or compensation claims are complicated by the fact that the seized properties often have changed hands or have been developed since they were confiscated. The Islamic Community of Macedonia (ICM) claimed it was not able to regain rightful use of several mosques that the Government had agreed to return and indicated that despite promises of full restitution, only 7 percent of its properties had been restituted. In addition, the ICM alleged that in some cases the Government delayed the process of restitution by selling or starting new construction on disputed property and by disputing the historical legal claim of the ICM to religious properties. The ICM continued to meet with government officials to seek to resolve property issues.

There were no developments in the suit that the Bektashi initiated against the Government in 2002 for failing to reverse the former Yugoslavia's nationalization of the Bektashi's Tetovo compound, known as the Arabati Baba Tekke. In addition, there were no developments in the 2004 suit the Bektashi filed against the ICM for the 2002 seizure of part of the Tetovo compound by armed ICM members. At the end of the reporting period, the ICM continued to occupy the area. Tensions between the Bektashi community and ICM peaked over the June 2009 burial of a Bektashi community member on the compound grounds. The ICM called the burial illegal and threatened to remove the body. The dispute remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Imprisoned for part or all of previous reporting periods, Jovan Vraniskovski, leader of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid," remained free after his release from prison in April 2007. However, government officials continued to refuse to return Vraniskovski's passport, and he remained abroad on his Serbian passport for the entire reporting period. Vraniskovski faced a detainment order for a third retrial of a case in which he was initially acquitted by the Veles Trial Court in 2006 on charges of embezzling MOC funds while he was a bishop with the MOC. The

Veles Trial Court judge requested the opinion of a panel of experts on Vraniskovski's bookkeeping, and his attorney reported that on March 23, 2009, the MOC tried to present additional evidence to the panel. At the end of the reporting period, the panel had not sent its opinion to Vraniskovski's lawyer, and a retrial had not been scheduled, since Vraniskovski had not been detained.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Construction was completed in January 2009 on a memorial home for Mother Teresa in her birthplace, Skopje, funded by the Ministry of Culture. Representatives of many religious communities joined government officials and international community representatives for the opening ceremony on January 30, 2009.

At the end of the reporting period, the Jewish Community of Macedonia and its Holocaust Memorial Fund neared completion of a Holocaust memorial and art center in Skopje, with funding of \$26.3 million (€17 million) from a 2007 agreement with the Government to restitute heirless Jewish properties.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador and other embassy representatives frequently met with government officials and representatives of religious communities to address religious freedom and to support ethnic and religious tolerance.

Embassy officials discussed the implementation of the 2007 legal status law with the court in charge of registrations and with government and religious leaders on

numerous occasions, advocating for implementation of the law in a way that meets international standards with respect to human rights and religious freedom and meets the deadlines contained in the law. Embassy staff also worked closely with a number of religious groups and communities seeking to register, serving as a central point for information-sharing among applicants frustrated by court delays and confused by the lack of clear application procedures.

In March 2009 the Embassy sponsored an International Visitors Leadership Program on Religious Life and the Public Sphere, which included a diverse mix of religious community and NGO representatives who visited the United States to explore the interplay between religion and state and the role of religious organizations in social welfare programs through meetings with government officials, NGOs, and religious organizations.

In February 2009 embassy staff and an alumnus of an exchange program on faith and community made a presentation at the Embassy's American Corner in Tetovo entitled "Muslim Life in the U.S.," that focused on a range of religious freedom and community issues. The Embassy also hosted an iftar, bringing together a diverse group of religious, community, and political leaders in observance of Ramadan and to discuss the challenges and successes of religious freedom in the country. Embassy representatives reached out to television and newspaper audiences with interviews discussing issues of religious freedom, specifically focusing on President Obama's outreach to Islamic communities worldwide.

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives attended events to foster religious freedom, tolerance, and understanding, including Holocaust commemoration events and holiday celebrations for various religious groups.

MADAGASCAR

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Before the March 2009 coup d'état, the U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, but after the coup, U.S. interaction with the Government was extremely limited.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 226,657 square miles and a population of 20.6 million. Although precise official figures were unavailable, approximately half of the population is Christian. There are four main Christian denominations: Roman Catholic, Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM), Lutheran, and Anglican. Smaller groups include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists. A significant minority of citizens also observes indigenous religious practices.

Muslims constitute 10 to 15 percent of the population, with strong concentrations in the north, northwest, and southeast. Native-born persons and ethnic Indian and Pakistani immigrants make up the majority of Muslims, as well as a small number of Hindus.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The April 2007 constitutional referendum eliminated the explicit secular nature of the state, but it did not diminish legal protection for freedom of religion. Former President Ravalomanana's position as a lay vice-president of the FJKM generated allegations of favoritism, and his occasional comments expressing a desire to transform the country into "a Christian state" generated controversy. With the March 2009 coup d'état, Protestants expressed concern about a backlash against the FJKM.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Assumption, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

State-run media granted religious organizations free access to state media provided that their use constituted a public service. National radio and television feature weekly Muslim programs, and daily 15-minute programs including the call to prayer were featured on national television during the month of Ramadan.

The law mandates that religious organizations register with the Ministry of Interior. By registering, religious organizations acquire the legal status necessary to receive direct bequests and other gifts. To qualify as a religious association, a group must consist of at least 100 members, with an elected administrative council of no more than nine members, each of whom must be a citizen. If the group's leadership and faithful are foreign, they have the right to form an association "reputed to be foreign." If the association's membership expands to 1,000 members, the administrative council may apply to be officially recognized.

Religious organizations that fail to meet the Ministry of Interior's registration requirements are free to register as simple associations. Simple associations do not have the right to receive gifts or hold religious services, limiting them to social projects. If these groups overstep what is allowed for their status, they violate the law and in rare circumstances are subject to legal action. Ministry officials estimated in 2008 that there were more than 1,000 religious organizations in the country operating without official state recognition, including both simple associations and unregistered organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In April 2009 leaders of the original New Protestant Church in Madagascar, formerly known by its Malagasy acronym FPVM, were permitted by the current regime to reopen the church, which had closed in 2005. The Government previously permitted the reorganization of the FPVM in 2007 under a new name and with new leadership. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (EURD) remained banned after overstepping the limits of its registration in 2005.

Muslim leaders estimated that as many as 5 percent of Muslims were considered noncitizens, despite being born in the country and having longstanding family roots there, because of citizenship laws and procedures. Lack of citizenship precluded their enjoying voting rights and other important civic benefits. Members of the Muslim community suggested that a Muslim-sounding name alone could delay one's citizenship application indefinitely; others suggested that their ethnic/religious difference sometimes limited their access to government services and financial assistance.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 17, 2009, military members of what became the self-proclaimed transitional government beat, abused, and briefly detained FJKM President Pastor Lala Rasendrasina. He was reportedly targeted due to his proximity to President Ravalomanana at the time of the coup, rather than for religious reasons. The new regime did not condemn the attack or prosecute possible suspects.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Some Muslims felt they received unequal treatment in schools, hospitals, private businesses, and the workplace.

The four largest Christian denominations occupy an important role in public life, although their collective role in politics has diminished somewhat in recent years. The Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar, led at the time by the Catholic archbishop, served as an intermediary in the early stages of the 2009 crisis but

withdrew entirely following the March 2009 coup. Leaders of both the FJKM (associated with the former government of Marc Ravalomanana) and the Catholic Church (associated with the current regime of Andry Rajoelina) tried to maintain a careful distance from the ongoing political struggle. However, both (and especially the Catholic Church) have seen their reputations as neutral actors in civil society severely tainted by perceptions of partisan engagement during the recent political turbulence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Before the March 2009 coup, the U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, but after the coup, U.S. interaction with the Government was extremely limited.

The U.S. Ambassador publicly condemned the detention and abuse of Pastor Rasendrasahina in March 2009.

MALAWI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no documented cases of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, there were anecdotal complaints from religious minorities regarding limited employment and educational opportunities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 45,747 square miles and a population of 13 million. Eighty percent of the population is Christian. Among the Christian groups, the largest are the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), with smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists. Muslims constitute approximately 13 percent of the population; the vast majority is Sunni. There are also Hindus, Baha'is, and small numbers of Rastafarians and Jews.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas.

Religious groups must register with the Government by submitting documentation to the Ministry of Justice detailing the structure and mission of their organization along with a nominal fee. Once approved, a religious group registers formally with the Registrar General's Office. During the reporting period, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups.

Foreign missionaries are required to have employment permits. Missionaries and charitable workers pay lower fees for employment permits than do other professionals.

Public schools offer religious education. Christian-oriented "Bible Knowledge" courses and "Moral and Religious Education" courses (that include Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, and Christian material) are available for schools. The Ministry of Education requires all schools to observe the right of students or their parents to choose their religious instruction; however, individual parent-teacher associations or school committees decide which religion courses to offer. Although the courses are voluntary, some Muslims have requested that the Ministry of Education only use the broader-based "Moral and Religious Education" course in primary schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Rastafarian leaders continued to take issue with an unofficial ban on long hair in public schools. Although there is no law relating to hair length, some schools prohibit long hair as part of their dress code. Rastafarian leaders provided the Ministry of Justice with a list of schools that enforced the ban, but the Ministry took no action.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no documented cases of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, there were anecdotal complaints from religious minorities regarding limited employment and educational opportunities. Christians, Muslims, and Hindus often participated in business or civil society organizations together.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

During the reporting period, the Embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, exchange programs, and the distribution of reading materials. Embassy officials appeared on local radio (including Radio Islam) to discuss issues of religious freedom.

MALAYSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. Article 11 states, "Every person has the right to profess and practice his religion," but also gives state and federal governments the power to "control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam." Article 3 of the Constitution states, "Islam is the religion of the Federation" and that "Parliament may by law make provisions for regulating Islamic religious affairs." Article 160 of the Constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslim. Civil courts generally ceded authority to Shari'a courts on cases concerning conversion from Islam, and the latter remained reluctant to allow for such conversions. Other laws and policies placed some restrictions on religious freedom.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government maintains an official list of 56 sects of Islam it considers "deviant" and a threat to national security. The Government may detain Muslims who deviate from accepted Sunni principles and subject them to mandatory "rehabilitation" in centers that teach and enforce government-approved Islamic practices. Muslims generally may not legally convert to another religion, although members of other religions may convert to Islam. Officials at the federal and state government levels oversee Islamic religious activities, and they sometimes influence the content of sermons, use mosques to convey political messages, and prevent certain imams from speaking at mosques. The Government maintains a dual legal system, whereby Shari'a courts rule on religious and family issues involving Muslims, and secular courts rule on other issues pertaining to the broader population. Government policies promoted Islam above other religions. Minority religious groups remained generally free to practice their beliefs; however, over the past several years, many have expressed concern that the civil court system has gradually ceded jurisdictional control to Shari'a courts, particularly in areas of family law involving disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims. Religious minorities continued to face limitations on religious expression and alleged violations of property rights. The Government restricts distribution of Malay-language Christian materials in peninsular Malaysia and forbids the proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives maintained an active dialogue with leaders and representatives of various religious groups, including those not officially recognized by the Government.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 127,000 square miles and a population of 27.7 million. According to 2000 census figures, 60 percent of the population practices Islam; 19 percent Buddhism; 9 percent Christianity; 6 percent Hinduism; and 3 percent Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions. Other minority religious groups include animists, Sikhs, and Baha'is. Ethnic Malay Muslims account for approximately 55 percent of the population. Three of the five most prominent political parties are organized along ethnic and religious lines. The majority of Christians reside in the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. Article 11 states that "every person has the right to profess and practice his religion," but also gives state and federal governments the power to "control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam." The law allows for citizens and organizations to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom. However, civil courts generally decided in favor of the government in matters concerning Islam. Article 3 states that "Islam is the religion of the Federation" and that "Parliament may by law make provisions for regulating Islamic religious affairs." Article 160 of the Constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslim. Civil courts generally ceded authority to Shari'a courts in cases concerning conversion from Islam, and the latter remained reluctant to allow for such conversions. The Constitution identifies the traditional rulers as the "Heads of Islam" within their respective states. Other laws and policies placed some restrictions on religious freedom.

Mosques are administered at the state level rather than by the Federal Government. State religious authorities appoint imams to mosques and provide guidance on the content of sermons.

The Government does not recognize marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims.

State authorities administer Shari'a laws through Islamic courts and have jurisdiction over all Muslims. Shari'a laws and the degree of their enforcement vary by state. State governments impose Islamic law on Muslims in some cultural and social matters but generally do not interfere with the religious practices of non-Muslim communities; however, debates continued regarding incorporating elements of Shari'a law, such as khalwat (close physical proximity with the opposite sex), into the civil law. Religious police have the authority to raid private premises as well as public establishments. The Government did not provide information on the number of raids carried out by religious police. Shari'a courts do not give equal weight to the testimony of women. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to the advancement of women's rights complained that women did not receive fair treatment from Shari'a courts in matters of divorce and child custody.

Amending the Penal Code is the exclusive prerogative of the Federal Government. Despite contradicting federal law, the state governments of Kelantan and Terengganu made apostasy, defined as the conversion from Islam to another faith, a capital offense. No one has been convicted or executed under these laws, as the laws cannot be enforced. Nationally, Muslims who seek to convert to another religion must first obtain approval from a Shari'a court to declare themselves "apostates." This effectively prohibits the conversion of Muslims, since Shari'a courts seldom grant such requests and can impose penalties on apostates.

In April 2009 a minister in the Prime Minister's Department announced he was seeking to implement unified Islamic laws to replace the individualized state Islamic laws.

The Government provides financial support to Islamic religious institutions and more limited funding to non-Islamic communities.

In January 2009 the Selangor state government, under the ruling People's Alliance coalition, allocated \$1.7 million (six million Malaysian ringgit) for non-Muslim places of worship. The federal government, allocated \$125.9 (RM428 million) to build Islamic places of worship, and \$2.4 million (RM8.1 million) to build Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and other places of worship for minority religious groups between 2005 and 2008.

The Government observes Hari Raya Puasa, Hari Raya Qurban, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Awal Muharram, Wesak Day, Deepavali, Thaipusam, and Christmas as national holidays. Good Friday is officially observed in East Malaysia.

The Government prohibits publications and public debates that it alleges might incite racial or religious disharmony, and strictly prohibits religious groups from proselytizing Muslims, although proselytizing non-Muslims is allowed.

During the reporting period, the state government in Kelantan, led by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), maintained its ban on traditional Malay dance theaters, prohibition on advertisements with provocatively dressed women, and enforcement of headscarves for Muslim women, and it imposed fines on violators. Kelantan's dress code requires Muslim women to wear clothes exposing only their faces and hands. The law also stipulates that non-Muslim women should avoid dressing "sexily or indecently." Violators of the dress code face fines up to \$146 (RM500). Women's rights leaders and the Minister of Women, Family, and Community Development criticized such regulations as overly restrictive. Authorities also required men and women to form separate lines at supermarkets and imposed fines on couples that sat too closely in public areas, such as park benches. In late June 2008, in Kota Bharu, the state's capital, city authorities began issuing pamphlets and public statements encouraging Muslim women not to wear high heels, bright lipstick, or transparent headscarves, in order to "preserve their dignity and avoid rape."

The Registrar of Societies, under the Home Ministry, determines whether a religious organization may be registered and thereby qualify for government grants and other benefits. The Registrar has no consistent policy on registering religious organizations or transparent criteria to make their determination. The Government refuses to recognize various religious organizations, and in order to operate legally, these groups sometimes registered themselves under the Companies Act. Examples include Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Registration under the Companies Act confers protections of religious freedom to the extent they are enjoyed by the country's other groups but precludes government funding.

State governments have authority over the construction of non-Islamic places of worship and land allocation for non-Muslim cemeteries. The Government, at both the federal and state level, often substantially delays permission to build or

renovate non-Islamic places of worship while granting permission to build mosques relatively quickly, according to local NGOs.

The Government continued to require all Muslim civil servants to attend approved religion classes, and several government agencies pressured non-Muslim women to wear headscarves while attending official functions.

Public schools generally offered Islamic religious instruction, which is compulsory for Muslim children; non-Muslim students are required to take nonreligious morals and ethics courses. At primary and secondary public schools, student assemblies frequently commence with recitation of a Muslim prayer by a teacher or school leader. Private schools are free to offer a non-Islamic religious curriculum as an option for non-Muslims. There are no restrictions on home schooling. The Government offered grants only to private Islamic schools that agreed to allow government supervision and adopted a government-approved curriculum.

National identity cards identify Muslims as such with visible print on the card's surface, but for members of other recognized religions, their religious affiliation is encrypted in a smart chip within the identity cards and not visibly printed. Muslims must also carry a special photo identification of themselves and their spouses as proof of marriage. The Government uses these cards to determine which citizens are subject to Shari'a precepts, particularly khalwat. Khalwat is a criminal offence under Shari'a and is punishable with two years' imprisonment, a fine of \$940 (RM 3,000), or both. Religious police can conduct raids at hotels and bars in order to catch Muslims dressed indecently, consuming alcohol, or in close proximity to members of the opposite sex and charge them under Shari'a.

In August 2008 Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) issued 100 summonses to Muslim patrons and workers for consuming alcohol when it raided a pub at a hotel in Selangor. The offenders were also ordered to appear at the JAIS office for counseling. Members of the tourism industry criticized the raid for inciting fear.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom selectively.

The Government banned 56 of what it considered "deviant" interpretations of Islam, maintaining that "deviant" views endanger national security and could

divide the Muslim community. Banned groups include Ahmadiyya, Islamailah, Shi'a, and Baha'i, among others. The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia established federal guidelines concerning what constitutes "deviationist" behavior or belief. State religious authorities generally followed these guidelines when determining these matters. With the consent of a Shari'a court, the Government may arrest and detain members of "deviationist" groups for "rehabilitation" to the "true path of Islam."

In November 2008 the Government announced it was monitoring the Qadiani sect, a branch of Ahmadiyah movement, which has been active for the last four years. JAIS declared the group deviant for having Islamic doctrine differing from the official interpretation. Among other differences, the Qadiani believe followers should perform the Hajj in India. The Government warned the group's followers it would take stern action against them; however, no action was taken during the reporting period.

According to religious groups and local NGOs, approval processes for building permits for places of worship were sometimes extremely slow. Minority religious groups also reported that state governments sometimes used restrictive zoning and construction codes to block construction or renovation of non-Muslim places of worship.

Local authorities sometimes demolished non-Muslim places of worship, some more than 100 years old, located on government land or plantations converted for development. However, in some cases state governments allocated land elsewhere and covered the cost to construct new places of worship.

A group of seven indigenous converts to Christianity sued the Kelantan state government after state authorities in January 2008 demolished a church located on land occupied by the indigenous people. The case remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

According to the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Taoists (MCCBCHST), the Government restricted visas for foreign Muslim and non-Muslim clergy under the age of 40 as a means of preventing "militant clergy" from entering the country. While representatives of non-Muslim groups did not sit on the immigration committee that approved visa requests, the MCCBCHST was asked for its recommendations in the majority of cases.

Shari'a courts have never recognized the conversion of ethnic Malays from Islam to another religion. The only conversions recognized during the reporting period were for women who had previously converted to Islam for marriage but were seeking to reconvert to their previous religious affiliation after their marriages dissolved. On March 19, 2009, the Shari'a Appellate Court upheld a decision of the Penang State Shari'a Court permitting Tan Ean Huang to return to Buddhism, which the state Islamic council opposed. Tan applied for conversion in 2006 after her Iranian Muslim husband abandoned her.

There was no discussion about protecting individuals wishing to convert from Islam. Non-Muslim family members, including spouses and children, continued to lose all rights to inheritances in such cases. Courts review on a case-by-case basis the religious status of minors in cases where one parent converts to Islam and the other does not, although they tended to rule in favor of the Muslim parent.

The Government bans and confiscates religious materials it finds deviant or offensive. During the reporting period, the Government banned 57 books with religious themes, including *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism*, by Norani Othman, co-founder of the Sisters In Islam (SIS), a local NGO promoting Islamic women's rights. Customs authorities seized six titles of Christian children's books for containing words deemed exclusive to Islam. The usage of words "Allah" (God), "Baitullah" (House of God), and "Solat" (prayer) are restricted for use by Muslim groups by the Publications and Al-Quran Texts Control Department under the Home Ministry as the Government claimed these words are the sole jurisdiction of the Muslim community.

In November 2008 the National Fatwa Council issued a directive to ban Muslims from practicing yoga, claiming that elements of Hinduism in yoga could corrupt their minds and beliefs.

In October 2008 the National Fatwa Council issued a fatwa banning "tomboys," or girls who act and dress like boys, as a violation of the tenets of Islam that encourages homosexuality. Under the fatwa, girls cannot have short hair or dress, walk, and act like boys. The fatwa is legally binding, although enforcement depends on the Islamic authorities of each state.

While practices vary from state to state, both the Government and the opposition PAS attempted to use mosques in the states they control to deliver politically oriented messages. In recent years several states controlled by the Barisan Nasional party (BN) banned opposition-affiliated imams from speaking at

mosques, vigorously enforced existing restrictions on the content of sermons, replaced mosque leaders and governing committees thought to be sympathetic to the opposition, and threatened to close down unauthorized mosques with ties to the opposition. In like manner, the opposition-controlled state government of Kelantan reportedly restricted imams affiliated with BN parties from speaking in mosques throughout the reporting period.

Only ethnic Malays, all of whom are considered Muslims by law, and certain non-Muslims in Sabah could be members of the dominant United Malays National Organization within the ruling coalition.

The Government continued to monitor the activities of the small Shi'a minority.

The Government restricts the distribution in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible and other printed materials, as well as Christian tapes. Since 2005 a policy initiated by the Prime Minister requires that Malay-language Bibles must have the words "Not for Muslims" printed on the cover and may be distributed only in churches and Christian bookshops. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials faced fewer restrictions in East Malaysia.

In April 2009 JAIS lodged a police report against a Youtube video that allegedly offends Islam. The video content showed a man prostrating before a Quranic verse and made fun of the azan, the Islamic call to prayer.

In March 2009 the Government reissued a ban on use of the word "Allah" in Bibles and other Christian publications. Responding to the ongoing legal battle between the Government and the Catholic Church, ten states issued a fatwa prohibiting non-Islamic uses of the word "Allah."

In December 2008 the Home Ministry renewed the annual printing permit for the *Catholic Herald*, the Catholic Church's Malaysian weekly newspaper, with three conditions: cease publishing its Malay language section (the national language), restrict sales to Catholic Church property, and print a disclaimer on the front page saying the paper is meant only for Christians. The Government later rescinded the newspaper's license following criticism from the country's Islamic Councils for allowing the Catholic Church to continue using the word "Allah." The *Herald* continued to use Allah to denote God, as the Catholic Church has done in the country for more than 400 years. The Catholic Church first filed a lawsuit against the Government in February 2008, after the Internal Security Ministry initially tried banning the Catholic Church from referring to Allah. The Government

claimed reference to Allah by Christians and in Christian literature could confuse the country's Muslims and draw them to Christianity. Court proceeding continued at the end of the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In October 2008 the Government banned the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), an unregistered umbrella organization for various NGOs focused on ethnic Indian concerns. Although not a religious organization, HINDRAF appealed for redress of perceived government marginalization of ethnic Indians, including the demolition of some Hindu temples. Waytha Moorthy, HINDRAF director, remained abroad citing a fear of arrest if he returned to the country. The Government utilized the Internal Security Act (ISA) to arrest five HINDRAF leaders in December 2007, claiming that their involvement in organizing protests during the previous month served to upset interracial harmony and thus threatened national security. The Government released two of the men in April 2009 with restrictive conditions, including not participating in press conferences, not leaving their area of residence without police permission, and regularly reporting to the police. The other three HINDRAF prisoners who initially refused to accept the conditions and remained detained under the ISA were subsequently released in May 2009.

In April 2009 the Government announced plans to relocate 29 Hindu temples in and around Kuala Lumpur to alternative locations. The Government issued a 30-day notice to temple caretakers to move to the new locations before the existing temples were destroyed. Many of these structures had been constructed on private plantations prior to the country's independence.

State-level Shari'a courts can order individuals who request to convert from Islam or who profess belief in a "deviant" Islamic sect to enter religious rehabilitation centers. The Government denies individuals the freedom to leave such centers until they complete the program. The Government did not release statistics on the number of persons sentenced to religious rehabilitation centers during the reporting period.

At the end of the reporting period, religious authorities continued to search for Ayah Pin and one of his four wives, the leading members of the Sky Kingdom, a banned nonviolent religious group in Terengganu. In December 2008 media reports indicated that Ayah Pin had returned to Malaysia, but the Government disagreed and stated he remained in Thailand. In June 2008 JAIS arrested a man

who claimed to be a "messenger from the sky" that had lived for "more than 3,000 years." The man had used his home as a gathering place for his followers.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports of minors converted to Islam in cases where one parent voluntarily converted to Islam and converted the children without the consent of the non-Muslim parent. Shari'a Courts usually upheld the conversions of minors despite the opposition of one parent. The Government usually did not act to prevent such conversions.

In April 2009 M. Indira Ghandi reported that her estranged husband, K. Patmanathan, forcefully converted her three children, ages one to 12 years old, to Islam without her knowledge in March by presenting their birth certificates to the state religious department in Ipoh, Perak. Ghandi became aware of the conversions only after the Shari'a court in Ipoh notified her of its decision to allow the conversions and grant her husband custody of the children. She appealed the decision in civil court. Following a public outcry, the federal Government announced in April 2009 that if a spouse converts to Islam, the children would follow the faith that both parents agreed to at the time of marriage. The Government also stated civil courts were the proper locations for dissolving marriages in the event of a spouse converting to Islam. The Attorney General's Office was tasked to review and propose changes to the existing law to prevent future complications when a spouse converts to Islam. The Malaysian Shari'a Lawyers Association and other Islamic groups criticized the Government's action, describing it as "an interference of legislative matters" that "threatens the freedom of the courts." In June 2009 the Conference of Rulers, a senior constitutional body, decided to solicit the views of state religious councils before making a decision on proposed amendments to laws on conversion.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religious converts, particularly those converting from Islam, may face severe stigmatization. In many cases, converts conceal their newly adopted beliefs and practices from their former coreligionists, including friends and relatives.

Anti-Semitic texts, including books such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, were readily available at street vendors and bookstores throughout the country.

The Government occasionally suppresses public discussions of controversial religious issues such as religious freedom, conversion of minors, and interfaith dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Embassy representatives maintained an active dialogue with leaders and representatives of various religious groups, including those not officially recognized by the Government. Embassy programs included visits to the United States for Islamic educators and lecture tours to Malaysia for American Muslim community leaders. The U.S. Government also funded civil society grants and exchange grants for representatives of NGOs working to promote greater religious tolerance, respect for diversity, human rights, and openness in the country.

MALDIVES

The 2008 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion. The law prohibits the practice by citizens of any religion other than Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religious beliefs only in private. Visitors must also refrain from encouraging local citizens to practice any religion other than Islam.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Freedom of religion remained severely restricted. The Government imposes a requirement that citizens be Muslims, and government regulations are based on Islamic law (Shari'a). The President is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam."

There were no specific reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. According to many officials and interlocutors, most citizens regarded Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believed that it promotes harmony and national identity.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 500 square miles, distributed across 1,200 coral atolls and islands, and a population of 380,000.

The population is a distinct ethnic group with historical roots in South Indian, Sinhalese, and Arab communities. The vast majority of the Muslim population practices Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners, including 675,000 tourists who visit annually (predominantly Europeans and Japanese) and 70,000 foreign workers (mainly Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, and Bangladeshis), in general are allowed to practice their religious beliefs only in private. Most Muslim tourists and Muslim foreign workers choose to practice Islam in private or at mosques located at the resorts where they work and live.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

MALDIVES

Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The new Constitution ratified in 2008 designates Islam as the official state religion, and the Government and many citizens at all levels interpret this provision to impose a requirement that all citizens be Muslims. The Constitution also stipulates that the President must be Sunni and has the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Chapter II of the Constitution relating to the fundamental rights and duties of citizens does not provide for the right to freedom of religion or belief. Furthermore, the Constitution precludes non-Muslims from voting and holding public positions. Article 9 of the Constitution states that a "non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives." This is widely interpreted to mean that all citizens must be Muslim and therefore that non-Muslims cannot vote. This provision contravenes obligations that the country has undertaken in signing several international conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Religious discrimination is enshrined in the new Constitution. Article 17 excludes religion from a list of attributes for which people should not be discriminated against. It states: "Everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms included in this Chapter without discrimination of any kind, including race, national origin, colour, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, or native island."

Several articles in the Constitution make the practice of Islam mandatory. Article 36 states it is imperative for parents and the state to provide children with primary and secondary education. Section (c) of that article states education shall strive to inculcate obedience to Islam and instill love for Islam. According to Forum 18, a nonprofit group that promotes religious freedom, in practice this wording is understood to mean that parents are forced to educate their children as Muslims, whether they are Muslim or not.

The "Protection of the Religious Unity Among Maldivians Act" states both the Government and the people must protect religious unity. Any statement or action contrary to this law is subject to criminal penalty; if a person is found guilty, sentences range from a fine to imprisonment.

On December 23, 2008, the Minister for Islamic Affairs stated that there was no reason to allow other religions in the country, as Maldives was a very unique country where all citizens are Muslims.

Non-Muslim foreign residents are allowed to practice their religious beliefs only if they do so privately and do not encourage local citizens to participate.

MALDIVES

The Government follows civil law based on Shari'a. Civil law is subordinate to Shari'a; in the event a situation is not covered by civil law, as well as in certain cases such as divorce and adultery, Shari'a is applied.

According to press reports, in October 2007, the Ministry of Justice banned clothing that conceals a person's identity in court; however, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, which is appointed by the Government, did not ratify former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's call for a blanket ban on the full veil. There have been no further developments since President Nasheed took office.

Foreigners were not allowed to import any items deemed "contrary to Islam," including alcohol, pork products, or religious statues for worship. Alcoholic beverages were available to tourists on resort islands, but it remains against the law to offer alcohol to a local citizen.

The Government observes Islamic holy days as national holidays.

Mosques were not required to register with the Government. The Government maintained and funded most mosques.

Under President Nasheed, as with former President Gayoom, the primary responsibility of imams was to present Friday sermons. They used a set of government-approved sermons on a variety of topics and were not legally empowered to write sermons independently. No one, not even an imam, may publicly discuss Islam unless invited to do so by the Government. According to government officials, this rule was in place to maintain a moderate Islamic environment rather than a fundamentalist one.

Under former President Gayoom, men who wished to act as imams were required to sit for public exams and present their scores and credentials to the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, chaired by the Chief Justice. The Supreme Council was empowered to certify imams. However, if the Supreme Council denied certification, the petitioner could appeal to the Board of Education. Since President Nasheed came to power in October 2008, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has replaced the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and has a mandate to control religious matters. Only scholars associated with the Adaalath Party are allowed to give previously unseen sermons, and all other imams are asked to read sermons preapproved by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

MALDIVES

The Human Rights Commission reported that there are female imams who, in that role, interact with women only.

Islamic instruction was a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funded the salaries of instructors of Islam. Islamic instruction was only one component of the curriculum used in the majority of schools. Arabic-medium schools focused primarily on Islam. Those who sought further religious education obtained it in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or other Islamic countries. Schools offered religious education for women.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Non-Muslim religious identity was prohibited; former President Gayoom stated repeatedly that citizens are born Muslim. On November 2, 2008, newly elected President Nasheed told the Sri Lankan newspaper *The Sunday Times*: "We have to respect different religious views. I hope with improved governance and the rights of people being guaranteed, the issue of fundamentalism will subside. People who want to preach can preach, and those who want to follow a different line also do so. Fundamentalism will be eradicated with democracy." However, President Nasheed did not dismantle former President Gayoom's legacy of restrictions on religious freedom.

President Nasheed replaced the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs with a new Ministry for Islamic Affairs. He appointed the head of the religiously conservative Adaalath Party, Sheikh Abdul Majeed Abdul Bari, as the head of the new ministry. Minister Bari told Minivan News in May 2008 that he believed apostasy was one of three offenses that must be punished by death, along with adultery and murder.

The Government continued to control all religious matters. Like its predecessor, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs provided guidance on religious matters. The Government set standards for imams to ensure they had adequate theological qualifications and to prevent fundamentalism from gaining ground. Minivan News reported that every Friday prayer since President Nasheed's inauguration has been led by a religious figure from the Adaalath Party. It said that in this way, Islam was being controlled by one group at the expense of other prominent scholars. The same report observed that a new Ministry newspaper published every Friday, called *Road to Steadfastness*, printed only articles written by Adaalath Party members.

MALDIVES

There were no places of worship for adherents of other religious groups. The Government prohibited the importation of icons and religious statues, but it generally permitted the importation of religious literature, such as Bibles, for personal use. The sale of religious items, such as Christmas cards, was restricted to the resort islands patronized by foreign tourists.

Under Majeed Abdul Bari, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs took several steps to increase its control on the way Islam is practiced in the country. In April 2009 the Ministry started a program to promote religious awareness in schools; however, the program promotes only Islam rather than an awareness of other religions. Miadhu News reported the program aims to create a disciplined youth who "love the religion and the country" and respect their parents.

On March 1, 2009, a committee on religious issues was established to tackle conflicting religious matters of national importance. The committee includes officials from the Ministry for Islamic Affairs, the President's office, the Prosecutor General's office, the Attorney General's office, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Defense and National Security, and the Maldives Police Service. One of the first issues discussed was a ban on discos. Minister for Islamic Affairs Abdul Bari, who is on the committee, said discos must be stopped in order to fulfill their mandate and prevent "un-Islamic conduct" within the country.

On February 26, 2009, President Nasheed inaugurated an independent council of religious scholars called a fiqh academy. The council consists of 17 religious scholars, all of whom are appointed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Minivan News noted that a number of prominent scholars were not appointed to the academy. The council's stated purpose is to debate on religious matters, issue fatwas, and link up with fiqh academies in other countries. The vice-president of the academy said one of the aims was to tackle religious divides in the country.

On January 4, 2009, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs said that it would stop a particular congregation from holding separate Friday prayers because they have "no relation to any government institution." A member of the prayer group said the fixed prayer time of 12:35 pm is not Islamic. Instead, the group prays at the time of the first call to prayer, and this time depends on the lunar calendar. Minister Bari justified the ban on the basis of the Protection of Religious Unity Act and provisions of the 2008 Constitution, which outlaw anything that is against the "tenets of Islam."

MALDIVES

Forum 18 reported that many persons, especially secular and non-Muslims, voiced their concern over the restrictions on religion in anonymous weblogs. It stated fear of social ostracism and government punishment prevented this concern from being openly expressed.

The Telecommunication Authority of Maldives (TAM) stated it blocked 11 websites containing anti-Islamic sentiments and pornography at the instruction of the Ministry for Islamic Affairs since November 2008. Three of the websites -- www.rajjeislam.com and two blogs -- were unblocked in April 2009 after their publishers and authors agreed to remove objectionable content. The blocked websites include a popular blog called Random Reflections and a Dhivehi and English-language Christian website.

The website www.raajjeislam.com was blocked because of its coverage of a dispute over the reading of the Witr Qunoot prayer. In the dispute, an imam for Shaviyani Atoll Foakaidhoo Island refused to recite the Witr Qunoot prayer while performing the dawn prayer. Minivan News reported that whether or not to recite the prayer was a common debate among some Islamic scholars. Raajjeeislam.com posted audio of the imam claiming the state Minister of Islamic Affairs had threatened him if he failed to cooperate with the Ministry's orders.

A blog called Secular Maldives wrote that on January 28, 2009 that a man was tried in the Maldives Criminal Court for denying the existence of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad. The state filed the case against Shub'hi Ismail, who was also accused with verbally abusing the prophet of Islam with foul language. The judge in the case, Mohamed Moosa, said that during the trial Mr. Shub'hi confessed that Allah exists and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah. After the sentencing, the judge made Shub'hi recite the Shahadah (profession of the Islamic creed) and asked him to embrace it strongly. The judge also warned him that apostasy is the gravest of all sins and Allah may punish a person instantly for it. He recommended that, since it is a matter related to creed, it would be better if such cases were sent to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs instead of the court.

In November 2008, a male citizen was investigated at the airport for having an English-language Bible in his luggage.

During his election campaign, President Nasheed appointed a woman as his running mate, but when his party's religious advisors challenged his decision as un-Islamic, he yielded to their pressure and dropped her from his ticket.

MALDIVES

While on a visit to India in December 2008, President Nasheed said there were approximately 150 citizens studying in radical madrassahs in Pakistan, and asked India to help provide more educational facilities to the country to prevent citizens from studying at such extremist institutions.

According to Minister of Islamic Affairs Abdul Bari, the election of President Nasheed's government provided a mandate to stop "un-Islamic" conduct. Steps were reportedly underway to close discos in Male to prevent members of the opposite sex from mingling. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs stated that it believes the prevalence of "un-Islamic" practices within the country is due to a lack of religious awareness and has offered to conduct awareness programs and provide assistance to foreigners seeking to convert to Islam.

Parents must raise their children to be Muslim in accordance with the law. Foreigners can raise their children to follow any religious teachings as long as they practice privately in their homes or hotel rooms and do not try to include local citizens in their worship.

The Government prohibited non-Muslim clergy and missionaries from proselytizing or conducting public worship services. Islamic proselytizing was also illegal unless a government representative was present. Conversion by a Muslim to another religious group is interpreted as a violation of Shari'a and may result in punishment, including the loss of the convert's citizenship. There were no known cases of the Government discovering converts and rescinding citizenship as a result of conversion. During previous reporting periods, would-be converts were detained and counseled to dissuade them from converting. However, according to press reports, a handful of the country's blogging community reportedly identified itself as atheist or Christian. Miadhu News reported that on March 17, 2009 the Ministry of Islamic Affairs launched a counseling program for would-be converts. Counseling sessions are held at the Ministry every morning. The purpose and content of the sessions was not clear.

Faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were not specifically precluded by law from operating.

The law prohibits public statements that are contrary to Islam.

The Government registered only clubs and other private associations that do not contravene Islamic or civil law.

MALDIVES

The 2008 Constitution states the President and cabinet ministers must be Sunni Muslims. Furthermore, in contrast to its predecessor, the 2008 Constitution also states Members of the People's Majlis (Parliament) and the judiciary must be Sunni Muslims. Atoll Chiefs must be Muslim; however, they are not required to be Sunni. The same was also true of Members of the Special People's Majlis, which drew up the new Constitution.

Under the country's Islamic practice, the testimony of two women is required to equal that of one man in matters such as adultery, finance, and inheritance. In other cases, the testimony of men and women is equal. Shari'a also governs estate inheritance, granting male heirs twice the share of female heirs. The Constitution provides that an accused person has the right to defend himself "in accordance with Shari'a." Family Law prohibits women from marrying non-Muslim foreigners but allows men to marry non-Muslim foreigners, as permitted by Shari'a.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no specific reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most citizens regard Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believe it promotes harmony and national identity.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government does not maintain an embassy in the country. The U.S. ambassador in Colombo, Sri Lanka, is also accredited to the Government in Male, and officers from the embassy in Colombo travel frequently to the country. The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

MALI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally freed practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 474,764 square miles and a population of 12.7 million. Muslims make up an estimated 90 percent of the population. Nearly all Muslims are Sunni. Most of these are Sufi; however, a sizeable minority reject Sufi traditions and refer to themselves as Sunnite or Ahl-al Sunna. An estimated 5 percent of the population is Christian; the Christian community is approximately two-thirds Catholic and one-third Protestant. The remaining 5 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs or no religion. The majority of citizens practice their religion daily.

Groups that practice indigenous religious beliefs reside throughout the country, but are most active in rural areas.

There are several mosques associated with the fundamentalist group Dawa al Tabligh; however, their influence appears to have declined in recent years.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The

Constitution defines the country as a secular state and allows for religious practices that do not pose a threat to social stability and peace.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Mawloud, The Prophet's Baptism, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), and Christmas.

The Minister of Territorial Administration and Local Collectivities may prohibit religious publications that defame another religion; however, there were no reports of such prohibitions during the reporting period.

The Government requires the registration of all public associations, including religious associations; however, registration confers no tax preference or other legal benefits, and failure to register is not penalized in practice. The registration process is routine and not burdensome. The Government does not require indigenous religious groups to register.

The High Council of Islam (HCIM) serves as the main liaison between the Government and hundreds of local Muslim groups and associations. The Government frequently consults with the HCIM on social issues of national interest.

Prior to making important decisions on potentially controversial national issues, the Government consults with a "Committee of Wise Men" that includes the Catholic archbishop and Protestant and Muslim leaders.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The country has strong traditions of tolerance and openness that extend to religious practices and beliefs. Adherents of different religious groups are often part of the same family. Followers of one religion attend religious ceremonies of other religious groups, especially baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials expanded dialogue with Muslim groups to promote religious freedom, mutual understanding, and the continued secularism of the Government. The Embassy maintained contact with the foreign missionary community and worked with government officials and societal leaders to promote religious freedom.

MALTA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago, consisting of three inhabited islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and has an area of 122 square miles. Its population is slightly more than 400,000. The overwhelming majority of citizens, 95 percent (2004 estimate), are Roman Catholic, and 53 percent (2005 estimate) attend Sunday services regularly. Almost all of the country's political leaders are practicing Roman Catholics.

Most congregants at the local Protestant churches are British retirees who live in the country or vacationers from other countries. Coptic and Greek Orthodox Christians, a union of 16 groups of evangelical churches comprising Pentecostal and other nondenominational churches, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Zen Buddhists, and Baha'is are also present. Of an estimated 3,000 Muslims, approximately 2,250 are foreigners, 600 are naturalized citizens, and 150 are native-born citizens. There is one mosque and a Muslim primary school. There is a Jewish congregation with an estimated 100 members. Approximately 2 percent of the population does not formally practice any religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse either by government or private actors.

The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion and declares that the authorities of the Catholic Church have "the duty and the right to teach which principles are right and which are wrong." Divorce is not available in the country; however, the state generally recognizes divorces of individuals domiciled abroad who have completed divorce proceedings in a competent court.

The Constitution provides for "[a]ll persons in Malta" to "have full freedom of conscience and enjoy the free exercise of their respective mode of religious worship."

The Government and the Catholic Church participated in a foundation that financed Catholic schools and provided free tuition in those schools.

The Government subsidized children living in church-sponsored residential homes.

To promote tolerance, school curriculums include studies in human rights, ethnic relations, and cultural diversity as part of values education.

Religious groups are not required to be licensed or registered.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Motherhood of Our Lady, the Feast of St. Paul's Shipwreck, the Feast of St. Joseph, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, the Feast of Our Lady of Victories, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas Day.

All religious organizations have similar legal rights. Religious organizations can own property, including buildings, and their religious leaders can perform marriages and other functions.

While religious instruction in Catholicism is compulsory in all state schools, both the Constitution and the Education Act establish the right not to receive this instruction if the student, parent, or guardian objects.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Muslims are able to meet and practice their religion freely. Muslim congregants forced to close down their informal prayer center in a private apartment in 2007 continued to have access to a mosque set up by the World Islamic Call Society, which has been functioning since 1973. There is also an informal mosque inside the Marsa Open Center, where many irregular migrants are provided housing after release from the closed detention centers.

In March 2009, a man was arrested, tried, and given a suspended one-month prison sentence after he pled guilty to vilifying the Catholic religion (a crime punishable by up to six months in prison) by dressing up as Christ during the February carnival festivities in the village of Nadur. Other individuals who dressed up as the apostles were reportedly arrested but not prosecuted.

Also in March, a controversy arose over human remains found at a Roman-era catacomb complex in the city of Rabat. Because of the presence of Jewish symbols on several of the burial sites, an international Jewish nongovernmental organization wanted the remains reburied at once according to Jewish rites, while the local heritage authority required the site and all remains to be carefully catalogued and recorded prior to the reburial (to which it had agreed). As of the end of the reporting period, the disagreement had not been settled, and cataloguing of the remains was ongoing.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period.

The Catholic Church makes its presence and influence felt in everyday life; however, non-Catholics, including converts from Catholicism, do not face legal or societal discrimination. Relations between the Catholic Church and non-Catholic religious groups are respectful and cooperative. Members of non-Catholic religious groups proselytize freely.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy's discussions with government officials and its informational programs for the public consistently emphasize basic human rights, including freedom of religion.

Through a variety of public affairs programs, the Embassy continued to work with different sectors of society, including religious groups, to promote interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, and tolerance. In 2008, the ambassador delivered a lecture on Muslims in America at the Malta branch of the Islamic Call Society, hosted an Iftar at her official residence, and participated in a Passover celebration hosted by the Jewish community.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of significant societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago with an area of 70 square miles and a population of 53,200. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (formerly Congregational), with 51.5 percent of the population; the Assemblies of God, 24.2 percent; the Roman Catholic Church, 8.4 percent; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 8.3 percent. Also represented are Bukot Non Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), 2.2 percent; Baptist, 1.0 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.9 percent; Full Gospel, 0.7 percent; and the Baha'i Faith, 0.6 percent. Nonreligious persons and persons who did not indicate any religious affiliation account for a small percentage of the population. The Jehovah's Witnesses were believed to have a few hundred practitioners, Jews fewer than 20, and Ahmadiyya Muslims fewer than 10.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no official state religion, but Christianity is the dominant social and cultural force. Governmental and social functions typically begin and end with an

interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister or other church official.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Gospel Day, and Christmas.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there consequences for not registering.

There is no religious education in public schools and no opening or closing prayers during the school day. However, most extracurricular school events begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer.

Foreign missionaries are present and operate freely. Religious schools are operated by the Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bukot Non Jesus, and the Baptist Church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who were not allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

MAURITANIA

The 1991 Constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. The Government prohibits the printing and distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and proselytizing by non-Muslims.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Authorities expelled a foreigner for distributing Christian materials.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government, religious leaders, and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 419,212 square miles and a population of 3.3 million. Almost the entire population practices Sunni Islam. There are very small numbers of non-Muslims, almost exclusively non-Mauritanian; Roman Catholic or other Christian churches are located in Nouakchott, Atar, Zouerate, Nouadhibou, and Rosso. Although there are no synagogues, a very small number of expatriates practice Judaism.

There were several foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active in humanitarian and developmental work in the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1991 Constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the sole religion of its citizens and the state. The Government prohibits the printing and distribution of non-Islamic religious materials, although possession of these materials is legal. There is an unofficial government regulation that restricts non-Muslims to meeting in the few Catholic or other Christian

churches. However, religious groups can meet in private homes after they receive official authorization from the authorities.

Shari'a provides legal principles upon which the law and legal procedures are based. Although there is no specific legal prohibition against proselytizing by non-Muslims, in practice the Government prohibits such activity through the broad interpretation of Article 5 of the Constitution that states, "Islam shall be the religion of the people and of the State."

The Government and citizenry consider Islam to be the essential cohesive element unifying the country's various ethnic groups. There is a cabinet-level Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education. The High Council of Islam, consisting of six imams, advised the Government on conformance of legislation to Islamic precepts. Although the Government provided a small stipend to the imam of the Central Mosque in the capital, members and other donors normally support mosques and Islamic schools.

The Government did not register religious groups; however, NGOs, including humanitarian and development NGOs affiliated with religious groups, must register with the Ministry of the Interior. NGOs must agree to refrain from proselytizing or otherwise promoting any religion other than Islam. In addition, the Government requires that groups, including religious groups, receive official authorization before they can meet, even in private homes. However, this requirement was not always enforced in practice.

The judiciary consists of a single system of courts that uses principles of Shari'a in matters concerning the family and modern legal principles in all other matters. The testimony of two women is necessary to equal that of one man in Shari'a. In awarding an indemnity to the family of a woman who has been killed, the courts grant only half the amount that they would award for a man's death. For commercial and other issues not addressed specifically by Shari'a, the law and courts treat women and men equally.

The Government requires members of the Constitutional Council and the High Council of Magistrates to take an oath of office that includes a promise to God to uphold the law of the land in conformity with Islamic precepts.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: First Muharram (Islamic New Year), Eid al-Mowlud (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad), Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha (Tabaski).

The Government restricts the use of mosque loudspeakers exclusively to the call to prayer and to Friday service in accordance with a 2003 law that prohibits the use of mosques for any form of political activity.

Both public schools and private Islamic schools include classes on Islam. Although attendance at these religious classes is ostensibly required, many students decline to attend for various ethnolinguistic, religious, and personal reasons. Students are able to advance in school and graduate with diplomas, despite missing these classes, provided they perform sufficiently well in their other classes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In late December 2008 authorities arrested a Norwegian woman in Ouadane for distributing Christian materials. She was released with a warning but was subsequently expelled from the country on January 2, 2009, after she continued her activities in Atar.

In March 2008 security forces briefly detained a man at a vehicle check point between Nouakchott and Rosso for carrying large amounts of undeclared currency and Christian proselytizing material.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, U.S. citizens active in Christian circles reported Mauritians who participated in Christian gatherings were ostracized by their families and neighbors.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy actively engaged prominent religious leaders in a dialogue to broaden mutual understanding of religious freedom principles and to explain the freedom with which Muslims practice their religion in the United States.

MAURITIUS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 718 square miles and a population of 1.3 million. In the 2000 census, 50 percent of the population claimed to be Hindu, 32 percent Christian, and 17 percent Muslim; other religious groups, such as Buddhist and animist, constitute 1 percent. Seventy-three percent of Christians are Roman Catholic. The remaining 27 percent are members of the following groups: Seventh-day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Church of England, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Sunnis account for more than 90 percent of Muslims; a minority are Shi'a.

On the main island, the north is primarily Hindu, while the center is mainly Catholic. There are large populations of Muslims and Catholics in the cities of Port Louis, Quatre Bornes, and Curepipe. Most mosques and churches are concentrated in these areas. The island of Rodrigues is 92 percent Catholic.

The country has tightly knit ethnic groups, known as "communities." There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity usually are Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice either Buddhism or Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually are Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

In March 2007 the Supreme Court ruled that a mosque could not use loudspeakers for the daily calls to prayer, in accordance with noise prevention regulations. Thereafter, the mosque and neighbors agreed on an acceptable volume for the loudspeakers.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Thaipooam Cavadee, Maha Shivratri, Ougadi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Eid al-Fitr, Divali, All Saints Day, and Christmas.

Religious organizations that were present prior to independence, such as the Catholic Church, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims, are recognized by parliamentary decree. These groups also receive an annual lump-sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based on the number of adherents as determined by the census. The Registrar of Associations registers new religious organizations (which must have a minimum of seven members) and grants them tax-exempt privileges. The Government reportedly did not refuse registration to any group.

The Government allows foreign missionary groups to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although no regulations restrict their presence or limit proselytizing activities, religious groups must obtain both a resident and a work permit for each missionary. The Prime Minister's Office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents. While there are no explicit limits on the ability of missionaries to operate, there are limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. The Government grants residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years with no extension.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources is responsible for promoting cultural interaction among different cultural groups within the country and sponsored events aimed at fostering cultural programs that included religious components.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

On May 29, 2009, the Commissioner of Police denied devotees access to a Hindu temple illegally constructed on land belonging to in-laws of the Prime Minister and situated opposite the Prime Minister's private residence. The police stated that it presented a "public safety issue" and declared the zone a protected area. The media reported later that residents had filed numerous complaints against the temple for noise pollution. The police arrested two radio reporters on June 9, 2009, for allegedly trespassing in the protected area. On June 12, 2009, the temple reopened to the public after the Prime Minister and the religious society managing the temple agreed that only small religious ceremonies would be held in the current temple until another temple is built to hold larger religious ceremonies.

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Christians and Muslims, alleged that they were prevented from reaching higher-level positions in the Government.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

On October 16, 2008, embassy officials discussed the benefits of religious pluralism with political figures and Muslim religious and community leaders during an embassy-hosted Eid al-Fitr dinner.

MEXICO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, there were some restrictions at the local level. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, usually in small, rural communities in the south. Most incidents occurred in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Hidalgo, and to a lesser extent in Mexico, Michoacán, Veracruz, and Nayarit. Government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and evangelical and Roman Catholic representatives agreed that these conflicts were often attributable to political, ethnic, or land disputes related to the traditional "practices and customs" of indigenous communities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,220,663 square miles and a population of 109 million. According to the Government's 2000 census, approximately 88 percent of respondents identify themselves as at least nominally Catholic. There are an estimated 11,000 Catholic churches and 14,000 Catholic priests and nuns. An additional estimated 90,000 laypersons worked in the Catholic Church. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include evangelicals (Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals, and Pentecostal Roots), "historical" Protestants (defined by the Government as Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, Mennonites, and others), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, and Jews.

The General Director for Religious Associations of the Federal Secretariat of Government (GDAR) registered 169 evangelical and traditional Protestant associations. The exact number of evangelical and other Protestant churches and pastors is unknown, and statistics on membership remain scant. Official figures sometimes differ from membership claims of religious groups. For example, the

Seventh-day Adventist Church claims a nationwide membership of 600,000 to 700,000 persons; however, in the 2000 census only 488,945 persons identified themselves as such. Also in the 2000 census, 205,229 persons identified themselves as Mormons, whereas Mormons claim membership of approximately 1.2 million. Protestants are concentrated primarily in the south. In the State of Chiapas, 21.9 percent of respondents in the 2000 census identified themselves as Protestant; however, some Protestant evangelical groups claim a much higher percentage. The National Bar of Christian Lawyers reported that in November 2008 they requested that the Interior Secretariat include a category for evangelical Christian in the next census but did not receive a reply.

The Jewish community claims approximately 50,000 members, most of whom live in Mexico City; there are also congregations in Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana, and Cancún. There is a small Shi'ite Muslim population in the city of Torreón, Coahuila and an estimated 300 Muslims in the San Cristobal de las Casas area in Chiapas. Some indigenous persons in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatán practice a syncretic religion that mixes Catholic and pre-Hispanic Mayan religious beliefs.

In some communities, particularly in the south, there is a correlation between politics and religious affiliation. A small number of local leaders reportedly manipulate religious tensions in their communities for their own political or economic benefit, particularly in Chiapas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government is secular.

Article 24 of the Constitution states that all persons are free to profess their chosen religious belief and to practice its ceremonies and acts of worship. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. The Constitution bars members of the clergy from holding public office, advocating partisan political views, supporting political candidates, or opposing the laws or institutions of the state. The law on Religious Associations and Public Worship defines the administrative remedies that protect the right to religious freedom. The Constitution prohibits any form of discrimination, including on the basis of religion.

The law permits religious groups to operate informally without registering with the Government; however, for a religious group to obtain a legal personality, which is necessary to negotiate contracts and purchase or rent land, it must register with the GDAR as a religious association. The registration process is routine. The most recent statistics show that 7,074 religious associations were registered, of which most were evangelical Protestant. During the reporting period, the GDAR registered 202 associations, some of which had applied for registration previously. In addition, at the end of the reporting period, a number of applications either awaited further supporting documentation or were not in compliance with registration criteria.

To register as a religious association, a group must articulate its fundamental doctrines and religious beliefs, not be organized primarily for profit, and not promote acts that are physically harmful or dangerous to its members. Religious groups must be registered to apply for official building permits, receive tax exemptions, and hold religious meetings outside their places of worship.

Religious associations must notify the Government of their intention to hold a religious meeting outside of a licensed place of worship. Thousands of notifications are typically submitted every year, and the Government routinely approves such requests. Religious associations may not hold any sort of political meeting.

The GDAR promotes religious tolerance and investigates cases of religious intolerance. The GDAR has translated the Religious Associations and Public Worship Law into 11 indigenous languages, including Purépecha from the State of Michoacán this reporting period, with the intention of completing a total of 16. If parties present a religious dispute to the GDAR, it attempts to mediate a solution. If mediation fails, the parties may submit the issue to the GDAR for binding arbitration. If the parties do not agree to this procedure, one or the other may elect to seek judicial redress. Municipal and state officials generally were responsive in mediating disputes among communities; however, when a solution was not found, officials were not always aggressive in pursuing legal remedies against offending local leaders.

The Federal Government coordinates religious affairs through the Ministry of Interior. Most states have specific offices dedicated to religious affairs; Chiapas, Guerrero, and Nuevo León have undersecretaries for religious affairs.

Of eight official holidays, Christmas Day is the only religious holy day that the Government observes; however, most employers also grant Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Christmas Eve to employees as paid holidays.

The Government requires religious groups to apply for a permit to construct new buildings or convert existing buildings into houses of worship. Any religious building constructed since 1992 is the property of the religious association that built it. All religious buildings erected before 1992 are classified as national patrimony, owned by the state, and exempt from taxes.

Religious groups may not own or administer broadcast radio or television stations. Government permission is required to transmit religious programming on commercial broadcast radio or television.

The Constitution states that public education must be secular, but religious groups are free to maintain private schools. Primary level homeschooling for religious reasons is not explicitly prohibited or supported by the law; however, to enter a secondary school, one must have attended an accredited primary school. Homeschooling is allowed at the secondary level after schooling at an accredited primary school has been completed.

The work of religious clergy in public institutions such as jails or hospitals is neither explicitly prohibited nor supported by law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Most of the discrimination occurred at the state and local levels. State and municipal governments generally protected religious freedom; however, some local community leaders and authorities, particularly in the south, allegedly used religious affiliation as a pretext for conflicts related to political, ethnic, or land disputes.

The Federal Government limits the number of visas each religious group is allowed; however, the application process is routine and uncomplicated. During the reporting period, the Government issued 2,408 visas to missionaries.

In May 2009 in La Trinitaria, Chiapas, a local religious rights organization reported that local authorities prohibited 70 evangelical Protestants, including 30 children, from purchasing basic foodstuffs as part of a governmental program for families. These actions were allegedly in retaliation for the families' refusal to contribute to local festivals typically occurring on Catholic holy days. In 2008 the same families reportedly had their utilities suspended for similar reasons.

In July 2008 the press reported that local authorities threatened Methodist families in Zopilotepec, Guerrero with loss of their church, physical harm to their children, and expulsion from the community.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, poor enforcement mechanisms allowed community leaders in Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, and several other states to discriminate against persons based on their religious beliefs. Federal and local government officials often failed to punish those responsible for acts of religious intolerance. The GDAR worked actively with state and local officials; however, criminal investigations generally tended to be sluggish.

In January 2009 in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, according to news reports, Catholics allegedly destroyed the foundation of an evangelical church under construction, and local authorities jailed the church's pastor.

In November 2008 local authorities reportedly detained three evangelical leaders--Roberto Martinez Santiago, Cristobal Pedro Martinez Jeronimo, and Benito Jeronimo Jeronimo--in Santiago Teotlaxco, Oaxaca for two days for refusing to contribute to or participate in local festivals typically occurring on Catholic holy days.

According to 2007 press reports, local authorities in Chiapas jailed Juan Mendez after his conversion to evangelical Christianity and released him the next morning.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, usually in small, rural communities in the south. Most incidents occurred in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Hidalgo and to a lesser extent in Mexico, Michoacán, Veracruz, and Nayarit. Religious differences frequently were cited as the cause of such incidents; however, the disputes often concerned other factors, including ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power.

In the central and southern regions, some leaders of predominantly Catholic indigenous communities regarded evangelical groups as unwelcome outside influences and as economic and political threats. These leaders reportedly sometimes acquiesced in or ordered the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging chiefly to Protestant evangelical groups. Local human rights organizations noted that conflicts were increasing due to lack of intervention by the state government. As in previous reporting periods, village leaders often imposed sanctions on evangelicals for resisting participation in community festivals or refusing to work on Sundays. Evangelicals complained of water cut-offs, expulsion from their villages, loss of community rights and personal possessions, beatings, death threats, the burning of churches and homes, and denial of government benefits due to religious affiliation. This was particularly common in Chiapas, where many residents follow a unique and centuries-old syncretistic mix of Catholicism and native custom. Endemic poverty, land tenure disputes, and a lack of educational opportunities also contributed to tensions, which at times resulted in violence.

Evangelicals often resisted making financial donations demanded by community norms that served partly to fund local festivals typically occurring on Catholic holy days. The National Bar of Christian Lawyers reported that it had to close its offices in Chiapas due to security concerns and could not provide updates on the cases of unresolved religious intolerance against evangelical Christians in Chiapas cited in the last report. The National Bar reported that there were 50 unresolved cases in the country, not including Chiapas, at the end of the reporting period.

In January 2009, according to press reports, electricity and water services to 74 evangelical families were suspended in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas. Demonstrators surrounded the governor's palace in protest.

In December 2008 Catholic groups and local authorities in San Nicolás, Ixmiquilpan reportedly prevented the burial of a 59-year-old evangelical woman, Otilia Corona, in the town cemetery. Although her family made a \$260 (3,400 peso) contribution towards maintenance of the cemetery, they were not permitted to bury her there. She was interred at her home in violation of general health laws.

In Zinacantán, Chiapas, a group of Catholics, with the alleged support of town authorities, reportedly threatened to take up arms against evangelicals who refused to contribute to local religious festivities. On November 19, 2008, evangelical Protestants from the town held a press conference denouncing the threats.

On June 13, 2009, Catholic priest Habacuc Hernández Benítez and two seminarians (Eduardo Oregón Benítez and Silvestre González Cambrón) were killed in Arcelia in the State of Guerrero. Although the motive was unclear, some news reports linked the killings to remarks by the Archbishop of Durango against drug traffickers.

On September 2, 2008, Catholic priest Gerardo Manuel Miranda Avalos was killed in a drive-by shooting at the entrance of a Catholic school in Los Reyes, Michoacán. In May 2008 Catholic priest Julio Cesar Mendoza Acuma died in a hospital in Mexico City following an attack by at least three armed individuals the previous night in his parish residence. In January 2008 the College of Catholic Lawyers, a lay group providing legal counsel to the Catholic Church, requested that authorities from the Federal District, Hidalgo, and Aguascalientes provide the status of the investigations into the criminally related killings of three Catholic priests, Humberto Macias Rosales, Fernando Sanchez Duran, and Ricardo Junious, in 2007. All of these cases remained under investigation at the end of the reporting period.

GDAR stated that it received three reports of religious intolerance in the country during the reporting period and that two of 14 pending conflicts were resolved. Government officials, the president of the National Human Rights Commission, and interfaith groups continued discussions about incidents of intolerance in order to promote social harmony. The Mexico City Interfaith Council included representatives from a broad spectrum of religious groups. Interfaith councils were also present in Chiapas, Nuevo León, and the Yucatán.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives met with government officials for religious and indigenous affairs and human rights at federal and state levels. Embassy officers also met with members of religious groups and NGOs.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 271 square miles and population of 108,000. The country consists of 607 islands spread over a 2,000-mile long swath of ocean; diverse languages and cultures exist within each of the country's four states. Several Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present in every state. Most Protestant groups trace their roots to American Congregationalist missionaries. The United Church of Christ is the main Protestant denomination. On the island of Kosrae, the population is approximately 7,800, 95 percent of whom are Protestants. On Pohnpei, the population of 35,000 is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. On Chuuk and Yap, an estimated 60 percent are Catholic and 40 percent Protestant. Smaller religious groups include Baptists, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Baha'i Faith. There is a small group of Buddhists on Pohnpei, although no Buddhist monks or clergy live on the island. Attendance at religious services is generally high; churches are well-supported by their congregations and play a significant role in civil society.

Most immigrants are Filipino Catholics who have joined local Catholic churches. The Filipino Iglesia Ni Cristo also has a church in Pohnpei.

In the 1890s, on the island of Pohnpei, intermissionary conflicts and the conversion of clan leaders resulted in religious divisions along clan lines which persist today.

More Protestants live on the western side of the island, while more Catholics live on the eastern side.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution's Declaration of Rights forbids the establishment of a state religion or governmental restrictions on freedom of religion.

The Government observes Good Friday and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government provides a few grants to private, church-affiliated schools. Public schools do not provide religious instruction.

Missionaries of many religious traditions are present and operate freely.

There are numerous church-sponsored schools, and religious groups operate radio stations that broadcast religious programming to many parts of the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There was no notable tension between the two largest religious groups, Protestants and Catholics, and an Inter-Denominational Council exists to address social problems and promote official cooperation between the two.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also worked closely with church-related nongovernmental organizations in its efforts to promote good governance and religious tolerance.

MOLDOVA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. The law includes restrictions that at times inhibited the activities of some religious groups. The latest law on religion, which went into effect in 2007, in theory simplifies registration procedures and allows religious groups easier access to public places to hold religious events.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government registered one religious group (affiliated with a previously registered group), and continued to deny registration to certain groups attempting to gain legal status. In Transnistria, a separatist region not controlled by the Government, authorities generally respected the rights of registered groups but continued to deny registration to a number of minority religious groups and to harass their members. All references in this report, unless otherwise stated, are to areas controlled by the internationally recognized Government.

According to members of Jehovah's Witnesses, many societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice occurred, including in the separatist region of Transnistria.

The U.S. Embassy raised concerns at high levels of Government regarding the persistent registration difficulties faced by some religious groups. In February 2009 the U.S. Ambassador hosted the third annual gathering for leaders of religious groups to support the expansion of religious freedom in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 13,000 square miles and a total population of 3.95 million, including 528,600 in the secessionist-controlled region of Transnistria.

The predominant religion is Orthodox Christian. According to various estimates, more than 90 percent of the population nominally belongs to either of two Orthodox denominations, Moldovan or Bessarabian.

According to the Government, the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC), which is subordinate to the Russian Orthodox Church, has 1,281 parishes, monasteries, seminaries, and other entities; the Bessarabian Orthodox Church (BOC),

subordinate to the Romanian Orthodox Church, has 309 such entities; and the Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church (Old Believers) has 15 parishes. There was no information on the number of parishes or followers of the True Orthodox Church of Moldova (also known as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad). Jehovah's Witnesses reported that they have 239 congregations, including 31 in the separatist region of Transnistria. According to the Baptist World Alliance, the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists of Moldova has 313 churches and 20,391 members. In November 2008 the European Baptist Federation stated that hundreds of indigenous missionaries are involved in establishing 40 new Baptist churches in the country.

Government figures also list 2,327 registered religious groups, in chronological order of date of registration, through June 11, 2008. The list does not distinguish between local parishes and denominations, or connect individual parishes to a parent denomination.

Adherents of other religious groups, constituting less than 10 percent of the population, include Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Jews, followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon (the Unification Church), Molokans (a Russian group), Messianic Jews, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and charismatic and evangelical Christian groups.

In Transnistria the largest religious organization is the MOC. Other groups include Roman Catholics, followers of Old Rite Orthodoxy, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and charismatic Protestants, Jews, and Lutherans.

On March 31, 2009, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) granted registration to the Armenian Christian Apostolic Cult and one of its religious communities. The MOJ states that the Armenian Christian Apostolic Cult is different from the Armenian Apostolic Church, which was granted registration in 1995 and had two religious communities. Both organizations share the same address, but have different legal identities.

The MOJ did not consent to specify the number of registration requests received during the reporting period. However, the Embassy received reports from Muslim groups and from Falun Gong that the MOJ has refused numerous requests to register the groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law on religion, which went into effect in 2007, in theory simplifies registration procedures and allows religious groups easier access to public places to hold religious events. The law includes restrictions that at times inhibited the activities of some religious groups.

The law on religion affirms the role of the Orthodox Church in the country's history, simplifies registration procedures, and liberalizes the access of religious groups to public places, requiring only that the groups agree upon the place with local authorities in advance. All groups, whether registered or not, enjoy freedom to worship and reported having free access to public places for their activities. However, at the end of the reporting period, only one unregistered religious group, the Armenian Christian Apostolic Cult, obtained legal status through the new registration procedures. After responsibilities for religious registration were transferred from the State Services for Religious Affairs (SSRA) to the MOJ in October 2007, three Muslim groups attempted to register but were unsuccessful.

In passing the law on religion, Parliament did not address the Council of Europe's (COE) concerns, expressed in April 2007, which called for legislation to define clearly a group's right to register as a religious community and have access to remedy in the case of refusal. The COE also had urged Parliament to define clearly the right of registration, including full legal personality, of all religious communities, including those with fewer than 100 members. In addition, the COE had recommended that Parliament clarify the conditions under which the MOJ might request the courts to prohibit activities of certain religious communities.

Registration gives religious groups legal status that allows them to own property, open bank accounts, and hire employees. Individual churches or branches of registered religious organizations are not required to register with the MOJ as long as they do not carry out legal transactions and receive donations as local legal entities. The parent organization must exercise authority in those domains for unregistered local branches. Unregistered groups may not own property, obtain construction permits for churches or seminaries, open bank accounts, hire employees, or obtain space in public cemeteries in their own names.

The procedures for registering a religious organization are the same for all groups. A religious organization must present to the MOJ a declaration of its exact name,

fundamental principles of belief, organizational structure, scope of activities, sources of finance, and rights and obligations of membership. The MOJ is required by law to register the religious organization within 15 days, provided that the registration request is made according to law. At the request of the MOJ, a court can suspend the registered status of a religious organization for 12 months if it "carries out activities that harm the Constitution or laws" or "affects state security, public order, [or] the life and security of the people."

The law gives freedom to local religious communities to change their denominational affiliation or dissolve themselves. All religious groups are allowed to hold services at state facilities, including orphanages, hospitals, schools, and military and police institutions, upon request from persons in such institutions and provided they get the approval of the institution's administration.

The law permits missionaries to sign work contracts with religious organizations, which in theory should ease the process to obtain residency permits. The law does not require such work contracts. However, the Bureau for Migration and Asylum (a part of the Ministry of Interior), in charge of temporary residency permits, required religious groups to issue work contracts to missionary employees that indicate their salaries. This requirement was imposed even when missionaries donated their services or were sponsored and paid by overseas churches. By requiring work permits, the Bureau for Migration and Asylum and the National Agency for the Occupation of the Workforce, which grants the work permits, in effect did not allow foreigners to work as unpaid volunteers.

Religious freedom rights enshrined in the previous religion law are preserved in the new law. It guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, permits alternative service for conscientious objectors to military duties, protects the confidentiality of statements made to a priest in the confessional, and allows denominations to establish associations and foundations.

Additions to the law that could be used to restrict religious freedom include: the requirement of at least 100 citizen founders to register a religious organization (some religious group members object to providing their official details in the document, citing an article in the law that "any request to indicate religious affiliation in official documents is illegal"); a more detailed definition of "abusive proselytism" (including "psychological manipulation or a variety of subliminal techniques"); and the recognition by the state of the "exceptional importance and fundamental role of the Christian Orthodox religion, particularly that of the

Moldovan Orthodox Church, in the life, history, and culture of the people of the Republic of Moldova."

A new Contraventions' Code (formerly known as the Code of Administrative Offences) was adopted on October 24, 2008, published on January 16, 2009, and entered into force on May 31, 2009. Article 54 of the Code provides for various fines from 700 to 4,000 lei (\$63 to \$360) for violating religious freedom. It also provides for expulsion of foreign religious believers who hold religious activity in public places, without first notifying the mayor's office. However, the article conflicts with European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rulings. Therefore, on February 9, 2009, the Permanent Governmental Commission established in September 2008 to implement ECHR decisions urged the Ministry of Interior (MOI), Prosecutor General Office (PGO), and Supreme Court of Justice to take the necessary steps in order to prevent expulsion of foreign religious believers who violate article 54. As a result, on February 23, 2009, the MOI issued an order stating that article 54 was not to be applied. At the time this report was written, there was no information indicating that article 54 sanctions had been applied.

Moldovan law provides for conscientious objection to military service. Transnistrian law has no provisions for alternative service. According to Article 325 of the Transnistrian Criminal Code, those who avoid or evade military service may be sentenced to fines from 4,427 to 10,710 rubles (\$527 to \$1,275) or imprisonment for up to two years.

There is no state religion; however, the MOC receives favored treatment from the Government. The Metropolitan of Chisinau and all Moldova holds a diplomatic passport. The Metropolitan participates as the sole religious figure in some national celebrations and appears regularly on the front pages of newspapers that support the Government. Progovernment television channels regularly show visits of high government officials to MOC churches and monasteries. Institutions such as state schools and hospitals display Orthodox icons on their walls.

The Government publicly supported fundraising for the repair and restoration of the monasteries at Capriana and Curchi. On August 28, 2008, President Voronin participated in the dedication of the Capriana Monastery, and praised the citizens and "national and international economic agents" which raised approximately \$8 million (82 million lei) for the reconstruction. On November 21, 2008, the President declared in a public speech that the Curchi Monastery was a "true pilgrimage site for the Moldovan people," and noted that the reconstruction and

repair of monasteries were "examples of cooperation between society, the Government, and the church."

On February 22, during the election campaign, President Voronin spoke to clergy at Condrita Monastery and stated that the Party of Communists (PCRM) was the only party that helped the church. Declaring that "Jesus Christ was the first communist," he added that the PCRM was the same as the MOC, and all other parties were the same as the BOC. He asked priests to vote for him as a person "who did a great deal for the church," even if they could not openly support the PCRM.

In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, which urged its priests to encourage parishioners to study party platforms and participate in April 5 parliamentary elections, the MOC made no such statement, declaring that the church is "a holy place exclusively for prayer." Two prominent Baptists ran as candidates for Parliament, representing the Liberal Democratic and Christian Democratic parties, without drawing negative comment for their religious affiliation.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Orthodox Christmas, Orthodox Easter, Easter Monday, and Memorial Easter (a commemoration of the dead).

Foreign missionaries may remain in the country for 90 days on a tourist visa. Foreign religious workers must register with, and receive documentation from, the National Agency for the Occupation of the Work Force, the Bureau for Migration and Asylum, and the Ministry of Informational Development.

According to the law on education, "moral and spiritual instruction" is mandatory for primary school students and optional for secondary school and university students. Some schools offer religion courses, but enrollment depends on parental request and the availability of funds.

Two public schools and a kindergarten are theoretically open only to Jewish students; in practice, children adhering to other religions also attend. In Chisinau one kindergarten has a special "Jewish group." Jewish students are not restricted to these schools.

On November 19, 2008, a new law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations was adopted by the Supreme Soviet in the separatist region of Transnistria, but was vetoed by the region's leader, Igor Smirnov. The veto was

overridden on February 4, 2009, by the Supreme Soviet. For the first time, the law provides for legal registration of religious organizations. The Office of the Commissioner for Religious Affairs was abolished and the registration authority passed to the Transnistrian "Ministry" of Justice.

The new Transnistrian law affirms the role of the Orthodox Church in the region's history. All religions, whether registered or not, enjoy freedom to worship, and foreign citizens share in those rights.

However, the Transnistrian law also provides for restrictions of the right to freedom of conscience and religion, if this is necessary to protect the constitutional order, morality, health, citizens' rights and interests, or state defense and security.

Religious organizations are not allowed to participate in elections, political party activity or support nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in elections of any kind.

Religious education may be offered in Transnistria, but only if parents and guardians take into consideration the child's rights to freedom of conscience. Extracurricular religious education in public and private schools is allowed if parents and guardians request it, and the child accepts it.

In order to receive legal registration in Transnistria, a local religious organization must have at least 10 members (aged 18 and above) with permanent residence in the region, and be able to confirm its existence for at least 10 years in the region. A local religious organization can also be registered as part of a centralized religious organization, which must consist of at least three local religious organizations. The religious organization must inform the registration authority about intentions to extend its activity on a yearly basis.

To receive Transnistrian official registration, a religious organization must provide the following documents: registration request, the list of founders with all personal details, the statute of the religious organization, the minutes from the constituent assembly, proof of activity for 10 years or more, basic religious doctrine, contact details of the governing body of the religious organization, and an official tax receipt. The Transnistrian "Ministry" of Justice has to make a decision on granting the registration. If the "Ministry" decides to conduct a "religious assessment," the registration can be postponed for up to six months. These assessment procedures are established by the "President" of Transnistria.

The Transnistrian law also provides for the activity and registration of foreign religious missions. However, it stipulates that the foreign religious organization cannot pursue religious activity, and does not enjoy the status of a religious organization, unless it is officially registered. The registration authority (the Transnistrian "Ministry" of Justice) oversees the religion's statute, its aims, and activity. Religious organizations can be liquidated upon their own decision or upon a Transnistrian court's decision. The prosecutor's office oversees the implementation of the legislation on religious freedom. The prosecutor's office and/or the region's executive, city, or district authorities can request liquidation, suspension, or ban of a religious organization in the court.

The Transnistrian law allows the use of homes and apartments to hold religious services. However, it does not allow the use of homes and apartments as accommodation (residence) for religious organizations. Religious services/rituals are also allowed in public places such as hospitals, clinics, orphanages, geriatric homes, and prisons, upon the request of religious organizations. Religious organizations can freely produce, publish, import, and export religious printing, audio and video, and other religious items. Article 28 imposes criminal, administrative, and other liabilities on those who violate the religious freedom legislation, but does not give details.

Although the Transnistrian law went into effect in March 2009 (after the veto was overridden), its provisions requested religious organizations to comply with it by December 31, 2008; otherwise, they would face liquidation. At the time this report was written, no consequences of failure to register had occurred.

The new Transnistrian law has no provisions that would permit alternative service for conscientious objection to military duties.

The provisions of the Transnistrian law are affected by the fact that the head of the Office of the Commissioner for Religious Affairs, which was abolished under the new law, was appointed as special advisor for religious affairs to "President" Smirnov. Since the "President" supervises operational relations between the "Ministry" of Interior and the registration authority ("Ministry" of Justice), and advises on registration and liquidation of religious groups, the advisor has de facto power to delay or deny registration.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Moldovan Government continued to deny registration to some groups. The Pentecostal Church complained that registration requests for new congregations were hindered by MOJ insistence that all the local church founders sign the request, even though the founders had already signed the incorporation papers and designated a single representative to sign the registration request.

In June 2009 several foreign missionaries reported that authorities were preventing the opening of evangelical Christian summer camps.

On May 12, the ECHR ruled in favor of Moldovan citizen Talgat Masaev, who had been found guilty by a local court in 2004 of practicing a religion not recognized by the state, after police entered the private residence where he and other Muslims were praying, and dispersed the group. Masaev appealed the sentence and the fine at an appellate court, which dismissed his application without comment, and did not invite him to attend the hearing.

The ECHR ruled that the state should not have punished members of an unregistered religious denomination for praying or otherwise manifesting their religious beliefs. Such actions by the state, the court ruled, amount to the exclusion of minority beliefs not formally registered by the state, and a dictation by the state regarding what persons could believe. The ECHR also ruled that Masaev, because he was not invited to the appellate court, had been denied an effective remedy to his complaint.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported numerous cases of religious restriction of their activity, including eight cases of prosecution for objection to military service in Transnistria. In Transnistria, only two of more than 30 Jehovah's Witnesses' congregations--those in Tiraspol and Ribnita--had legal status at the end of the reporting period. There were 24 reports of restrictions of Jehovah's Witnesses' religious activity in Transnistria. Local town/village authorities refuse to issue proof of existence/activity of the religious community in the region, which is required to get registration under the new law. Local authorities sought to cancel the fiscal code (necessary for financial transactions) for Jehovah's Witnesses, confiscated religious literature and the registration certificate of the group in Ribnita, and interfered with a memorial celebration in the village of Parcani. Court victories won by Jehovah's Witnesses were regularly overturned and new trials ordered.

Transnistrian authorities are attacking the legal status of Jehovah's Witnesses on several fronts by (1) challenging the remaining 1994 registration for Tiraspol; (2)

refusing to accredit the "leaders" of the Tiraspol community and the Ribnita community; (3) refusing to register new charters for Jehovah's Witnesses in Tiraspol, Ribnita, Grigoriopol and Tighina; (4) seeking to cancel the fiscal code for Jehovah's Witnesses; (5) confiscating religious literature; (6) creating difficulties connected to the use of the Kingdom Hall in Ribnita; (7) illegally confiscating the Registration Certificate of the Ribnita community; (8) interfering with the memorial celebration in Parcani; (9) persecuting members because of their stand on neutrality, and (10) attempting to liquidate both the Tiraspol and the Ribnita communities. Court cases are prolonged by local legal authorities.

Transnistrian authorities continued to prosecute members of Jehovah's Witnesses for their conscientious objection to military service. Consequently, between 1995 and 2008, more than 30 Jehovah's Witnesses have been prosecuted because of their conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons. Some individuals have been sentenced to a one-year prison term to be served on probation and others have been fined an amount equivalent to \$450 to \$1,000. The cases of the plaintiffs were frequently slowed by the absence of judges or prosecution representatives on the dates scheduled for hearings.

On November 11, 2008, Oleg Mundrescul enrolled in alternative service in accordance with Moldovan law. Transnistrian authorities accepted the alternative service in accordance with Article 23 of the Transnistrian Law on military service, which exempts from recruitment in peacetime all "citizens" who perform military or alternative military service in another "state."

On November 28, 2008, Igor Gnilenco was fined \$565 (5,000 TNR rubles) for refusing military service on religious grounds. His case remained under appeal at the end of the reporting period.

On February 12, 2009, the Transnistrian Supreme Court rejected the appeal of Nicolai Procopciuc, who had been protesting since 2007 against his notification to report for military service, on the grounds of religious convictions. In December 2004 Procopciuc was convicted by the Bender City Court for conscientious objection to military service and was fined an amount equivalent to \$450.

On February 12, 2009, the Transnistrian Supreme Court rejected the appeal of Ivan Coroliov, who had been protesting since June 04, 2008 against his notification to report for military service, on the grounds of religious convictions. On October 9, 2008 the TNR Supreme Court judge rejected the motion and sentenced Coroliov to one year in prison with a suspended sentence.

Religious communities, especially Protestants, complained of cumbersome bureaucratic procedures to obtain permission for foreign citizens to live and conduct religious work in the country. Applicants must have a total of 16 documents, including a medical certificate, a certificate confirming they have not committed crimes in their home country, a blood test stating that they are free of AIDS, and evidence of insurance. They then must apply to the National Agency for the Occupation of the Workforce for a work permit. That permit, if approved, is presented to the MOI's Department of Migration and Refugees in order to receive the migration certificate. If the application is approved, the applicant must present the work permit and the migration certificate to the Ministry of Informational Development, which issues the residence permit, with a validity not exceeding one year. Only registered religious organizations may apply for such permission. When extending the residency permit validity, the same procedure must be followed, but with the additional requirement of presenting a criminal record certificate confirming that the applicant has not committed crimes in the country during previous stays.

On March 3, 2009, the Transnistrian Supreme Court rejected the complaints of Jehovah's Witnesses who had requested authorities to investigate a March 2008 incident in which the Parcani economic crimes unit advised them not to hold an annual religious observance, and 40 demonstrators gathered at the house of the Jehovah's Witnesses' leader, holding signs that criticized Jehovah's Witnesses as a dangerous sect.

On April 11, 2009, two Romanian-citizen priests serving three BOC parishes in Cahul raion (district) were stopped at the Oancea-Cahul border crossing as they attempted to re-enter the country to conduct Easter services. Although the priests had residency permits and had served for many years, they were denied entry under provisions of new regulations requiring that Romanian citizens possess a visa and an invitation from the MOI.

On March 30, 2009, the Mayor of Mereni rejected a request for permission to build a Jehovah's Witnesses place of worship, despite the community's successful appeals of refusals to the level of the Supreme Court of Justice, and the November 2008 order of the Anenii Noi Bailiff's Office.

Transnistrian authorities continued to use a textbook at all school levels containing negative and defamatory allegations regarding Jehovah's Witnesses.

Property disputes between the MOC and BOC remained unresolved. Although the law provides for restitution of property confiscated during successive fascist and Soviet regimes to politically repressed or exiled persons, the provision does not apply to property confiscated from religious organizations or their constituent parts during successive Nazi and Soviet regimes. On March 19, 2009, the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe concluded that the Government had fulfilled all its obligations towards the BOC. Local authorities can make arrangements with local parishes to return church properties; in practice these arrangements almost always benefit the MOC. Partly because the Government continued to refuse to return archives to the BOC that were confiscated during the Soviet years (1945-91), the BOC was unable to give an exact count of the churches that it could claim as former BOC properties.

At the end of the reporting period, the ECHR had not ruled on the Government's 2001 decision to make the BOC the successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church for purposes of all property ownership. The BOC complained that its access to documents proving its right to numerous properties was blocked. Likewise, the ECHR had made no decision regarding the October 2006 Floresti BOC parish petition regarding the ownership of a church that the MOC claimed as its property.

The Lutheran Church claimed properties, most of which were destroyed in World War II. For example, a 400-seat Lutheran church, on the site now occupied by the Presidency in Chisinau, was destroyed by the Soviets in the early 1960s. Government authorities used legal arguments to deny the claim by Lutheran officials and stated that properties would not be returned because there were not enough congregants to support their use.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

For several days before Passover in April 2009, police and customs officials visited one of the Chisinau synagogues, claiming that they had a right to inspect a humanitarian assistance shipment of matzos and kosher food for the upcoming holiday. Although the shipment had cleared customs at the border, the officials returned repeatedly, at one point with 17 officers, and randomly opened packages of food. Officials made no arrests and assessed no fines.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported numerous cases of religious abuses during the reporting period. On November 30, 2007, Mihai Beiu, mayor of the village of Gvozdova, assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses Victor Patrascu and Gheorghe Ciobanu.

Beiu declared that he, the local Orthodox priest, and residents did not want Jehovah's Witnesses speaking about their religion in the village. He further threatened them with violence if they did not stop their activity. In July 2008, Victor Patrascu noted that Beiu had stopped his persecution and threats.

On September 27, 2007, Vitalie Zicu, the Orthodox priest in the village of Ustia, verbally attacked Jehovah's Witnesses Natalia Roscovan and Olesea Baltag, insulting and threatening them with violence if they did not stop their activities and leave the village. On October 12, 2007, a complaint was submitted to the Glodeni Regional Police Station. On January 16, 2008, a petition was submitted to the Glodeni Regional Prosecutor. On January 21, 2008, the Glodeni Regional Police Station stated that Zicu had been warned about committing similar violations.

On September 20, 2007, Petru Oltu, the Orthodox priest in the village of Harbovet, assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses Iulia Vizii and Aliona Raiu. He threatened them with violence and death because of their speaking about their religion and forcibly brought them to the mayor's office. On October 17, 2007, a complaint was submitted to the Anenii Noi Regional Police Station. On January 9, 2008, a petition was submitted to the Anenii Noi Regional Prosecutor. On February 12, 2008, the Anenii Noi Police Station stated that the facts contained in the complaint could not be confirmed. On March 21, 2008, another complaint was submitted to the Anenii Noi Regional Prosecutor. On April 29, 2008, the Anenii Noi Regional Prosecutor stated that the facts had been partially confirmed but that there was no basis for criminal charges. On May 22, 2008, a complaint was submitted to the Prosecutor General Office. On June 30, 2008, the Anenii Noi Regional Prosecutor noted that no violations had been discovered and that the complaint would not be reexamined.

On November 17, 2007, Stepan Sarbu, mayor of the village of Taraclia, assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses Zinaida Tabacari and Ana Verenjac. Sarbu forbade them to talk to local residents about their faith and threatened to gather a mob to assault them. On December 24, 2007, Zinaida Tabacari and Ana Verenjac reported the incident to the Causeni Regional Police Station. Police rejected the complaint, stating that the mayor's actions were covered neither by the criminal nor by the administrative legislation. On April 29, 2008, a complaint was filed with the Causeni Regional Prosecutor. On August 7, 2008, the prosecutor rejected the complaint, stating it had no basis for a criminal investigation.

On September 29, 2007, Ilie Bulduratu, mayor of Susleni, assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses Andrei Negru and Ion Perlog and threatened them with death if they

were to return to the village and speak to others about their religion. On October 30, 2007, a complaint was submitted to the Orhei Regional Police Station. On January 9, 2008, a complaint was submitted to the Orhei Regional Prosecutor. On February 27, 2008, the Orhei Police Station communicated that the facts contained in the complaint were not true. On March 21, 2008, another complaint was submitted to the Orhei Regional Prosecutor. No further developments have been registered.

On November 9, 2007, Mihail Ciobanu, the Orthodox priest in the village of Carpesti, verbally attacked Jehovah's Witnesses Timotei and Natalia Onofrei. Ciobanu threatened them with violence, told them to produce authorization to carry out their activities, and warned them to leave the village or face a mob that would be gathered to oppose them. On December 7, 2007, a complaint was submitted to the Cantemir Region Police Station. On April 3, 2008, a complaint was submitted to the Cantemir Regional Prosecutor. On May 29, 2008, the Cantemir Regional Police Station stated that the facts had been partially confirmed, and Ciobanu received an official warning about his conduct.

On December 3, 2007, Toma Lungu, the Orthodox priest in the village of Puhaceni, shoved Jehovah's Witnesses Sergiu Pavalache and Petru Ipate in the street. He then insulted the two and threatened them with violence if they did not leave the village and stop talking to residents about their religion. On December 24, 2007, a complaint was submitted to the Anenii Noi Regional Police Station. On January 18, 2008, the Anenii Noi Regional Police Station stated that Toma Lungu had been officially warned about committing any similar violations.

On February 15, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses Banari Vitalie and Tomita Ion were assaulted by Simeon Onofrei, mayor of the village of Zaicana (Criuleni), who prohibited their activity and threatened them with violence if they did not immediately leave the village. On March 9, 2009, a complaint was filed with the Criuleni Regional Police Station.

On July 3, 2008, Tacu Constantin and Tudor Burac were prohibited from carrying out their activity in the village of Copanca (Causeni). Council member Iliev Mihail explained that the Copanca Village Council had adopted a decision to prohibit the activity of other religions in the village. On October 1, 2008, the Causeni Regional Prosecutor decided that local officials had not prohibited the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses and therefore were not subject to criminal proceedings.

On November 29, 2008, Jehovah's Witnesses Natalia Croitor and Oxana Verhovetchi were stopped by the mayor of village Copanca (Causeni rayon), who prohibited their activity and explained that 2,000 signatures had been gathered by those who opposed the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. On December 24, 2008, a complaint was submitted to the Causeni regional prosecutor requesting administrative proceedings against the Mayor of the village for obstructing the activities of a religious organization. On March 24, 2009, the prosecutor rejected the complaint. On April 1, 2009, a complaint was submitted to the Causeni Regional Court requesting that the prosecutor's order be annulled. On May 5, 2009, the Causeni Regional Court annulled the prosecutor's order and accepted further examination of the complaint. No further developments have been reported.

On July 9, 2008, Jehovah's Witnesses Alexandra Machedonschi and Olesea Lisac were assaulted on a public street in Chisinau by Gavrilita Severin, an Orthodox priest who destroyed their religious publications and spoke against the Jehovah's Witnesses. Severin was also reported to have assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses Oleg Vrinceanu and Sergiu Pintili on August 20, 2008 and Nina Fedorencu on September 26, 2008. Local police were informed. No further developments were reported.

On January 2, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses Angela Gherasim and Liliana Petrascu were verbally assaulted by Orthodox priest Iulian Rata in the village of Lucaseuca, who obstructed their activity and declared that he was authorized to destroy the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. A complaint to the local prosecutor and regional court were dismissed.

On February 6, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses Olga Spac and Alina Tiganas were assaulted in the village of Tudoraby a group of people who intimidated them with firearms, and threatened them with violence if they continued their activity in the village. Local police responded to the Jehovah's Witnesses' complaints by closing the case on the grounds that no criminal or administrative violations had occurred.

On November 2, 2008, Jehovah's Witnesses Veaceslav Laba and Iosif Ivanov were assaulted by Orthodox priest Ion Lunic in the village of Bardar, along with a group of about 30 people, who insulted them, threatened them with the destruction of their property, and prohibited them from entering the village to carry out their religious activity. The Ialoveni regional prosecutor rejected complaints by the Jehovah's Witnesses, but on March 27, 2009, the Ialoveni Regional Court overrode

the Ialoveni regional prosecutor's decision and ordered re-examination of the complaint.

On March 29, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses Andrei Cius and Denis Reabaconi were assaulted by Lunic Ioana, wife of the Orthodox priest of the village of Bardar, along with a group of three persons, who insulted them, threatened them with violence, and prohibited them from entering the village to carry out their religious activity. On April 17, 2009, a complaint was submitted to the Ialoveni regional prosecutor.

On December 22, 2008, Orthodox priest Veaceslav Maxim verbally assaulted Galina Duluta and Mariana Dontu, who were preaching publicly in the village of Taraclia de Salcie, and threatened them with death. On January 12, 2009, Maxim shoved Galina Duluta to the ground, grabbed her hair and dragged her around. He then doused her with water and insulted her with obscene language. Following this attack Duluta was unable to stand up because of pain in her leg. After complaints, Maxim was summoned to the police office and in the presence of the authorities he continued to shout at the Jehovah's Witnesses. On January 22, 2009, the Cahul City Court examined the case of abuse and found Maxim guilty of "simple hooliganism" and fined him \$20 (200 Moldovan lei).

In contrast with the previous year, the BOC reported no cases of police checks of congregants at religious services or of religious leaders in their offices. In the summer of 2008, the Labor Inspectorate carried out checks at BOC offices at the request of Vladimir Turcanu, at that time Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Issues, Appointments and Immunities. Turcanu made his request on the basis of allegations that Christian Democratic Party Member of Parliament Vlad Cubreacov was a BOC employee.

On December 26, 2007, BOC Metropolitan Petru Paduraru, who holds a Romanian diplomatic passport, was held for two hours at a land border crossing from Romania, searched, and asked to sign a statement that he was carrying no drugs.

Following President Voronin's December 2007 criticisms of the BOC, the BOC reported that soon afterward, police or other security officers visited most of its priests at home or in church and warned them that they could be punished for "Romanian heresies." Authorities also reportedly told BOC priests that leaving the BOC for the MOC would bring many advantages.

Police and other security and immigration officials continued occasionally to check the identities of Muslim worshippers leaving Friday prayers, made video recordings of worshippers, and requested that they visit police headquarters to explain their activities. A spokesman for the Islamic League for Preaching and Guidance said that attendance at worship has dropped considerably as a result of perceived intimidation. The spokesman also noted that authorities have refused to allocate separate sections in cemeteries for Muslim burials, and require that Muslims buy two plots in regular cemeteries so that the body can be oriented towards the Kaaba, as opposed to the east-west orientation used in Orthodox graveyards. Authorities do not permit Muslim women to be photographed in headscarves for official documents such as national IDs and passports. Several Muslim women were told by officials that they should leave the country, even though they were Moldovan citizens. Other Muslim worshippers reported being roughed up by police on their way to worship.

The pastor of the Full Gospel Church of Christ the Savior, registered in 1995, complained of constant checks of documents and worshippers by Transnistrian authorities.

On December 4, 2007, Transnistrian authorities fined an independent Baptist pastor \$6.60 (55 Transnistrian rubles) for refusing to allow court executors into his home to seize property to pay previous fines levied for his failure to register his church.

On October 8, 2007, Transnistrian State Security Ministry officers arrested several members of the Protestant New Life Mission as they were preparing to distribute copies of a Christian magazine outside Tiraspol's Shevchenko University. Officials seized 800 copies of the magazine and confiscated the car of the New Life Mission leader, who was later fined \$139 (1,167 Transnistrian rubles) for bringing contraband literature into the area. On October 17, officials returned the car but refused to return the magazines.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In April 2008 the Chisinau Appeals Court ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses who filed a March 2008 complaint regarding missionaries who had been refused work permits. Following the ruling, all missionaries received work permits.

On February 9, 2009, the Permanent Governmental Commission established five months earlier to implement ECHR decisions urged the Government to implement all ECHR decisions made in favor of the BOC. No progress had been made on implementation. The Commission also requested the Ministry of Interior, Prosecutor General, and Supreme Court of Justice to prevent the expulsion of foreign religious workers who hold public activities without first informing the local mayor's office. No individuals have been arrested or charged for such activities since the request was made.

On February 2, 2009, the Ministry of Justice added two new courses, dedicated to religious freedom, to training programs of the National Institute of Justice, and instituted related seminars in the first semester of 2009.

Following a July 1, 2008, roundtable discussion, supported by the U.N. Development Program, between the Government and religious groups, the Government published on the MOJ website a guide to the laws and regulations that govern registration of religious groups and their component parts. The 49-page guide includes specific examples of the sorts of documents that are supposed to be submitted.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On March 1, 2009, vandals broke into the Bender synagogue in the Transnistrian region and painted neo-Nazi graffiti on the walls. They desecrated the Torah scroll, stole silver religious objects, and burned posters. Police were investigating the crime as an incident of hooliganism. The Jewish community is seeking full restitution of the property, and some NGOs have speculated that the vandalism could be a form of harassment connected to the case. At the end of the reporting period there had been no further developments.

Some Muslim women reported that they were mocked at school and at work for wearing headscarves. Some reported that university professors arbitrarily failed them in examinations.

The dispute between the Moldovan and the Bessarabian Orthodox Churches continued.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy raised concerns at the highest levels of the Government regarding the persistent registration difficulties of some religious groups and requested that registration procedures be clarified and simplified.

From January 10 to February 1, 2009, four Moldovan religious leaders, representing the BOC, two Protestant churches, and the Baha'i Faith, toured the United States under the sponsorship of the U.S. Government. The group met with religious and secular groups in the United States, and examined the role played by religious groups in the United States, interconfessional cooperation, and religious freedom.

In February 2009 the U.S. Ambassador held a third annual reception in honor of religious freedom, hosting representatives of registered and unregistered religious organizations, including representatives of the BOC, two Islamic groups, the Unification Church, a Chisinau synagogue, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Baptist Church, an evangelical seminary, and the Baha'i Faith. For the second year in a row, no governmental representative attended. The Ambassador encouraged participants to continue their efforts to promote religious freedom and harmony.

Embassy representatives continued to support the registration of religious groups and the registration and residency permits of foreign religious workers throughout the country.

MONACO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. The Government denies permission to operate to religious organizations it regards as "sects."

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The principality has an area of 0.8 square miles and a population of 35,000. Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and most of the approximately 7,200 citizens adhere to that faith, at least nominally. There are five Catholic churches in the principality, in addition to a cathedral. An archbishop presides over the Archdiocese of Monaco. Protestantism is the next most practiced religion, with two churches. There is also one Greek Orthodox church and one synagogue. The Constitution provides the 28,000 noncitizen residents the same religious freedom as citizens. Most noncitizens also adhere to either Catholicism or Protestantism, although there are some who practice Judaism, Islam, or other religious beliefs. There are 1,000 Jewish noncitizen residents. There are no mosques.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, there are some restrictions. The Government does not have an official list of banned "sects" but denies registration to groups labeled as such by the Interministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) of France. Any request to set up an association or hold a meeting from a group on this list is denied.

MONACO

Catholic ritual generally plays an important role in state festivities, such as the annual national day celebration and significant events in the life of the ruling family.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There is no law against proselytizing by religious organizations registered formally by the Ministry of State. The Government reported that it neither received nor denied requests for registration of groups on the MIVILUDES "cult" list during the reporting period; however, the Government stated that if such requests were made, they would be denied.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the principality.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There is an active ecumenical movement. Religious leaders of various denominations periodically participate in joint religious services and cultural events to promote greater understanding and mutual tolerance among different confessions. Representatives of all religious groups are invited to participate in state celebrations in the Cathedral of Monaco.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

MONGOLIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, the law limits proselytizing.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Some religious groups faced bureaucratic harassment from local governments or were denied registration.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including pressure on persons who converted to Christianity.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 604,247 square miles and a population of 2.7 million. Buddhism is closely linked with the country's cultural traditions. When the Government ended bans on all religious practices in 1990, Buddhist activity increased. Local scholars claim that more than 90 percent of citizens subscribe to some form of Buddhism, although practice varies widely. Lamaist Buddhism of the Tibetan variety is the traditional and dominant religion.

Ethnic Kazakhs, most of whom are Muslim, are the largest ethnic minority. They constitute approximately 5 percent of the population nationwide and 80 percent of the population of the western province of Bayan-Olgii. The Mongolian Muslim Association estimates that there are 135,000 Kazakh Muslims, fewer than last year due to migration to Kazakhstan. Muslims operate approximately 40 mosques and seven Islamic student centers, and there are an estimated 3,000 students of Islam. An Islamic cultural center is under construction in the capital of Ulaanbaatar. The mosques and Islamic centers receive financial assistance from religious organizations in Kazakhstan, Turkey, and the Gulf States.

There is a small but growing number of Christians. Church officials estimate more than 4 percent of the population practices Christianity, of which an estimated 90

percent are Protestant and 9 percent are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Roman Catholics and members of the Russian Orthodox Church together account for the remaining 1 percent. Some citizens practice shamanism, often in tandem with another religion, but there are no reliable statistics on their number.

Throughout the country, there were 457 registered places of worship, 239 of which were Buddhist, 161 Christian, 44 Muslim, and five each were Baha'i and shamanistic. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs (MJHA) registered 18 churches, 20 mosques, and three shaman temples. Evangelical Christians estimated there were 250 unregistered evangelical churches throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, the law limits proselytizing. Some religious groups seeking registration also face burdensome bureaucratic requirements and significant delays (see Restrictions). The Constitution explicitly recognizes the separation of church and state.

Although there is no state religion, many government officials are Buddhists who believe that Buddhism is the "natural religion" of the country. The Government contributed financially to the restoration of several Buddhist sites that are important religious, historical, and cultural centers. The Government did not otherwise subsidize Buddhism or any other religious groups.

A religious group must register with the MJHA to function legally as an organization. MJHA relegated responsibility for nongovernmental organization (NGO) registration (including religious organizations) to the newly created General Authority of State Registration (General Authority) in late 2008. Because registrations are only valid for 12 months, religious institutions must renew their registrations annually. Registrations can be renewed officially for up to three years. The Government approved at least 50 one-year extensions for religious groups in Ulaanbaatar in 2008. Registrations and renewals allow the Government to vet applications, as well as to supervise and limit the number of places of worship and clergy. The Government, particularly at the local level, sometimes

reportedly used the registration process as a mechanism to limit the number of places for worship.

A group must provide the following documentation to the General Authority when applying to register: a letter requesting registration, a letter from the city council or other local authority granting approval to conduct religious services, a brief description of the organization, its charter, documentation of its founding, a list of leaders, financial information, brief biographic information on the person wishing to conduct religious services, and the expected number of worshippers. Although the General Authority possesses the ultimate authority to approve an organization's application, approval is largely pro forma. In practice, local legislative bodies adjudicate the applications and separate local registration, particularly when groups seek to operate in the countryside. The Ulaanbaatar City Council and other local legislative bodies require similar documentation prior to granting approval to conduct religious services.

The Government grants religious visas for individuals who intend to stay in the country more than 90 days, but the application process is time-consuming, and only 50 religious visas were granted in 2008.

All private religious schools receive state funding for their secular curriculums. The Government is prohibited by law from giving state funds to religious schools for religious education. This policy is equally applied to all religious groups.

Religious organizations are required to pay property taxes and social security. NGOs, including religious organizations, are not required to pay income tax, but some religious organizations outside the capital were apparently unaware of this provision and paid income taxes. All nondiplomatic individuals and organizations, including religious organizations, are required to pay customs duties and value added tax (VAT) on nonfinancial goods from abroad, including food, clothing, and medical donations.

By law, all foreign organizations must hire a certain number of nationals for every foreign employee. The mandatory percentage of national employees varies from 60 to 95 percent, depending on the industry. The law applies to both religious and secular organizations. Certain religious organizations have had difficulty obtaining visas because they did not meet their quota of national employees.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Both the preliminary registration and annual renewal process are burdensome for religious groups. The application process, which can range from two weeks to several years, may deter religious organizations that wish to register. Some Christian groups have alleged that local officials indicated there are "too many" churches or that there should at least be parity in the registration of new Buddhist temples and new Christian churches.

Authorities in Tuv Province, near Ulaanbaatar, continued to deny registration to Christian churches during the reporting period. There were no churches registered in the province. According to a Tuv religious leader, there were more than 30 unregistered evangelical churches in the province, but none of them had been approved by local authorities. One church that was denied registration during the reporting period sued provincial authorities. The court ruled in favor of the church and provincial authorities appealed the case to the Supreme Court.

Unregistered religious institutions were often able to function in practice. Some institutions reported harassment by authorities and were unable to sponsor foreign clergy for visas. Unregistered churches allegedly experienced harassment by frequent visits from local tax officers and police, although no fines were reported. Registered churches also reported harassment by local authorities who demanded that they present official documentation and, in some cases, requested bribes. It was unclear if the alleged harassment was religiously motivated, anti-foreign, or due to corruption.

Church leaders in other provinces reported fewer problems. One unregistered Christian church in Zavkhan Province reported that local officials were not strict about registration requirements. In Uvs Province, a Christian leader reported a positive relationship with local government officials who expressed appreciation for medical work the church provided.

The Muslim community in Ulaanbaatar continued to report on the difficult process of attaining registration and land acquisition for proposed mosques in the provinces of Darkhan-Uul and Orkhon. They reported no problems, however, with the ongoing construction of the Muslim cultural center and mosque in Ulaanbaatar.

A Ministry of Education directive banned instruction of foreign languages or other subjects that used religious teaching or instruction. Monitoring remained strict, especially in the capital area, but there were no reported violations of the ban

during the reporting period. The Government may revoke the request of a religious group for an extension of registration if the group violates the ban or recommend that employers fire teachers who teach religion in the classroom. No such cases were reported during the reporting period.

The law forbids the spread of religious views by "force, pressure, material incentives, deception, or means which harm health or morals or are psychologically damaging." During the reporting period, no formal complaints were brought under this law.

Since July 2008, the Government has expelled approximately 70 foreign religious workers. In February 2009, Ulaanbaatar police detained for four hours a local lawyer who represented religious workers facing deportation. No charges were issued, but, according to the lawyer, he was fined, given an administrative penalty, and warned not to represent foreign religious workers in the future. Immigration officials also tried to revoke his law license and asked his employer to fire him. The lawyer appealed, and the court determined the police had acted illegally. The police appealed, and a decision had not been rendered at the end of the reporting period.

According to a local Christian organization, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture released three textbooks about Buddhist history to secondary school students in conjunction with the Buddhist Center in London. The Christian organization complained the Government was favoring Buddhism by distributing "religious textbooks" to students.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period. On a number of occasions, church authorities reported that foreign Christians in Ulaanbaatar were

victims of assault or other crimes, although it was not clear whether the crimes were religiously motivated. Some Christian leaders believe the crimes were religiously motivated, but others felt the crimes against foreign missionaries were due to anti-foreign, rather than anti-Christian, sentiment.

Some citizens who believe Buddhism is the "natural religion" of the country criticized the alleged use of material incentives to attract potential converts to Christianity. A local Christian NGO reported that local attitudes towards Christianity were slowly improving as a result of churches' charity and development work.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with government officials at the local, provincial, and national levels. This dialogue served to articulate a number of U.S. government concerns, particularly registration difficulties Christian groups and others experienced. Embassy officials encouraged the National Human Rights Commission to enhance its efforts to protect religious freedom. The embassy maintained contact with local representatives of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and the U.N. Development Program to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officials also met frequently with religious leaders across the country.

MONTENEGRO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some instances of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials met with representatives of religious groups, promoted interfaith cooperation, and conducted other outreach activities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 5,417 square miles and a population of 630,000. More than 74 percent of the population is Orthodox, 18 percent is Muslim, and 3.5 percent is Roman Catholic. The remaining population is composed of members of other religious groups, agnostics, atheists, and "undeclared" persons.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution provides for the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion as well as the right to change one's religion or belief and the freedom to, individually or collectively, publicly or privately, express that religion or belief by prayer, preaching, customs, or rites. No one is obliged to declare one's own religious beliefs. According to the Constitution, freedom to express religious beliefs may be restricted only if necessary to protect the life and health of citizens, public peace and order, and other rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

There is no state religion. However, legislation recognizes religious communities, which according to the Constitution are separate from the state and are equal and free in the exercise of religious affairs. There are four principal religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), Montenegrin Orthodox Church (CPC), Roman Catholic Church, and Islamic Community. The Government Commission for Political Systems, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, is responsible for regulating relations between the state and religious communities according to the 1977 Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities. Many members of religious communities alleged that the 1977 law is outdated and advocated for a new law to regulate relations between the state and religious communities.

Official funds are available to support religious communities and are allocated according to individual requests submitted by the communities upon approval of the Secretariat General of the Government. During 2008 the Government allocated \$162,000 (€121,380) to the SPC, \$113,000 (€85,000) to the CPC, \$113,000 (€85,000) to the Islamic Community, and \$46,000 (€35,000) to the Catholic Church.

The Government observes Orthodox Christmas and Easter as national holidays. Orthodox believers may also celebrate the family patron saint's day at their discretion. Catholics are entitled to celebrate Christmas, Easter, and All Saints' Day. Muslims are entitled to celebrate Greater Bairam and Ramadan. Jews are entitled to celebrate Passover and Yom Kippur.

When a religious community is founded, it must register with the local police within 15 days. Religious communities are given the status of a legal entity.

Religious studies are not included in primary or secondary school curriculums.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In January 2009, prompted by a CPC appeal, the Administrative Court revoked the decision of the Ministry of Finance to return 20 local churches and 2 monasteries in Cetinje to the SPC and ordered the Ministry to make a new decision. The SPC

described the Administrative Court's ruling as a "political decision that was not founded in the existing legislation."

In contrast with previous reporting periods, there were no reports that SPC Bishop Filaret, who resides in Serbia, had any difficulties travelling to Montenegro to perform his religious services as he had in the past. Filaret was allegedly associated with Hague Tribunal fugitives Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb war time political leader, and Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb military commander, during the 1990s, and Montenegrin authorities prevented him from entering the country on three occasions in 2007, based on his inclusion on a list of persons suspected of assisting war criminals.

By the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Economic Development had not implemented the decision of the former Urban Planning Ministry to remove a Serbian Orthodox church from the top of Rumija Mountain in the southern part of the country. The CPC threatened to file a claim with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) against the Government for its failure to implement its decision on removal.

The Law on Restitution envisages that property confiscated from religious communities by the former Yugoslav government after World War II will be regulated by separate legislation; however, at the end of the reporting period, no such legislation had been adopted. Religious communities may file their claims for restitution, but no action on the religious communities' claims may be taken under the existing law.

At the end of the reporting period, various religious groups had filed claims for restitution, but no significant progress on their claims was reported. The SPC accused the Government of delaying the return of SPC property and filed suit with the ECHR. Press reports claimed that up to one third of the country's territory, including adjoining forests, orchards, and other areas, could be affected. The Catholic Church and Islamic Community also filed claims on property in several locations. Reis Rifat Fejzic, leader of the Islamic Community, expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that the law concerns only claims for property expropriated after 1945, arguing that significant Islamic Community properties had been confiscated earlier. He urged the Government to establish a central registry of confiscated property and assist in recovering documentation pertaining to this property.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some instances of societal abuse and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout the country, and it was difficult to categorize such acts as either primarily religious or ethnic in origin.

The press reported an increase number of church burglaries and cemetery vandalism, although no official statistics were given.

Tensions were high between the two Orthodox Churches, the SPC and the CPC. They continued to struggle over property and to gain predominance, with both claiming to be the "true" Orthodox Church in the country.

On May 11, 2009, National Parks of Montenegro filed a lawsuit against Budimir Lopicic for illegal construction on state-owned land. Lopicic financed construction of the CPC Church of Saint George at Gavrilovac on Skadar Lake, which the CPC claimed was the first CPC church built since 1918.

On April 14, 2009, the Basic Court in Niksic fined eight women from the village of Dragovoljici for insulting police and violating the public order on September 21, 2008. On that day, followers of the SPC tried to block Miras Dedejic, head of the CPC, and followers of the CPC from passing through Dragovoljici on their way to the village of Risji Do, where CPC members intended to lay the foundation stone at a new church building site. Police briefly detained 65 protesters, of whom 10 received fines for holding up traffic.

On April 14, 2009, the CPC and SPC traded accusations in the media over ownership of the Church of St. Nikola in Cevo, near Cetinje. The SPC threatened to sue the CPC for stealing objects from the church on April 12, 2009. On the same day, the CPC complained of "the devastation of Montenegrin cultural heritage by the SPC."

On January 16, 2009, the media reported that a group of Cossacks from Russia would provide protection to the monastery in Cetinje, which is the seat of the SPC in the country, following an earlier announcement by the CPC that it intended to take possession of all monasteries and churches in Montenegro built before 1918. However, at the end of the reporting period, no Cossacks were providing protection to the monastery.

On October 26, 2008, the CPC and SPC exchanged accusations in the media over ownership of the Church of St. John the Baptist in Bajice near Cetinje, and the SPC announced that it would sue CPC leader Miras Dedejic for allegedly vandalizing the church. On January 20, 2009, police forbade priests of both the SPC and the CPC from entering the church to perform a liturgy on the same day. According to the press, police cordoned off the area and used force to stop SPC and CPC members from entering the church. On February 6, 2009, SPC attorney Dalibor Kavacic filed suit against Miras Dedejic, along with Milan Martinovic, Dusan Martinovic, and Bojan Bojovic (all CPC members) for changing the lock at the church on January 28 and violating the SPC's freedom to conduct services in the church. The Cetinje Basic Prosecutor, Luka Martinovic, dismissed the case and opened an investigation into allegations that SPC priests Gojko Perovic and Obren Jovanovic had entered the church illegally to perform a religious service. SPC lawyer Kavacic appealed the Cetinje prosecutor's decision and asked the Chief State Prosecutor of Montenegro to investigate the Cetinje prosecutor for being biased in favor of the CPC.

On September 4, 2008, the SPC issued a public statement requesting the protection of rights, property, and dignity of the SPC. They urged judicial bodies to stop passing decisions under duress and accused the police, media, and state officials of violating the public peace and religious freedom by tolerating the allegedly violent conduct of the CPC. The SPC requested that state institutions provide protection against illegal construction near SPC shrines and that spiritual, religious, and cultural objects be included in building plans.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials met regularly with leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with SPC and CPC representatives, to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights.

MOROCCO

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion, and the King is "Commander of the Faithful" and has the responsibility of protecting Islam in the country. Non-Muslim foreign communities openly practice their faiths.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, and it continued to sporadically enforce existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. In March 2009 the Government seized Shi'a literature, interrogated Shi'a Muslims, and closed a private Iraqi school, in a stated effort to stop the spread of politicized Iranian Shi'ism. The Government also detained and interrogated a group of female citizens who had converted from Islam to Christianity and expelled five female Christian missionaries. The Government restricts non-Islamic religious materials and proselytizing. Several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and non-Muslim religious groups and places some restrictions on individuals and organizations when it deems their actions to have exceeded the bounds of acceptable religious or political activity.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination toward those with different religious beliefs, including converts from Islam to other religions. Many citizens believe that the country is enriched by its centuries-old Jewish minority, and Jews lived in safety throughout the country during the reporting period.

The U.S. government regularly discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 172,414 square miles and a population of 34.8 million, of which 98.7 percent is Muslim, 1.1 percent Christian, and 0.2 percent Jewish.

According to Jewish community leaders, there are an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Jews, approximately 2,500 of whom reside in Casablanca and are the remnants of a much larger community that has mostly emigrated. The estimated size of the Rabat Jewish community is 200, and 250 live in Marrakech. The remainder of the

Jewish population is dispersed throughout the country. The population is mostly elderly, with a diminishing number of young persons.

The predominately Roman Catholic and Protestant expatriate Christian community consists of approximately 5,000 practicing members, although some estimates are as high as 25,000. Most expatriate Christians reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas. Local Christian leaders estimate there are 4,000 Christian citizens (mostly Berber) who regularly attend "house" churches and live predominately in the south. Local Christian leaders estimate there may be as many as 8,000 Christians throughout the country who have made professions of Christian faith but do not regularly meet because they fear government surveillance and social persecution.

There are an estimated 3,000 to 8,000 Shi'a Muslims, most of them expatriates from Lebanon or Iraq, but also a few citizen converts. Several thousand citizens who currently reside in Europe have reportedly adopted Shi'a beliefs. The Baha'i community, located in urban areas, numbers 350 to 400 persons.

Followers of several Sufi Muslim orders undertake joint annual pilgrimages to the country. One of the most prominent of these orders is the Zaouia Tijania of which as many as 30 followers each week, mostly from West Africa, make spiritual pilgrimages to Fez to worship at the tomb of Sheikh Ahmed Tijani, who is said to have brought Islam to the subregion. The Tariqa Al-Qadiriya Al-Boutchichia, highly influential in the country, celebrates the Prophet Muhammad's birthday every year, praying with its living master, Sheikh Sidi Hamza Al-Qadiri Al-Boutchichi, in the city of Berkane.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion, and the King is "Commander of the Faithful" (referring to people of the monotheistic faiths: Muslim, Jewish, and Christian) and has the responsibility of protecting Islam in the country. All citizens, including the normally immune Members of Parliament, may be prosecuted on charges of expressing opinions alleged to be injurious to Islam. The law prohibits the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials and bans all proselytizing, but the Government tolerates several small religious minorities with varying degrees of restrictions. The Government monitors activities in mosques and of non-Muslim

religious groups and places some restrictions on participants when it deems their actions have exceeded the bounds of acceptable religious or political activity.

According to article 220 of the Penal Code, any attempt to stop one or more persons from the exercise of his/their religious beliefs or from attendance at religious services is unlawful and may be punished by three to six months' imprisonment and a fine of \$14 to \$71 (115 to 575 dirhams). The article applies the same penalty to "anyone who employs incitements to shake the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion." Any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal. Foreign missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or attempt to conduct their work discreetly.

The Government cites the Penal Code's prohibition on proselytizing in most cases in which courts ruled to expel foreign missionaries. Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil codes.

A 2002 law restricting media freedom states that expression deemed critical of "Islam, the institution of the monarchy, or territorial integrity" is not permitted and may be punishable by imprisonment. Satellite, internet programming, and print media are otherwise fairly unrestricted.

A small foreign Christian community operates churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without government restriction. Missionaries who refrain from proselytizing and conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations are largely left unhindered; however, those whose religious activities become public face expulsion.

Foreigners attend religious services without any restrictions or fear of reprisals. Due to societal pressure, fears over government surveillance, and laws governing public gatherings, many local non-Muslim and non-Jewish groups feel constrained not to worship publicly; some meet discreetly in their homes. Article 2 of the Public Assembly laws states that "any association founded for an illicit cause or reason, in violation of these laws, good morals/customs or which has a goal of the undermining of the Islamic religion, the integrity of the national territory, the monarchy, or calls for discrimination, is invalid."

The Government permits the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. There are a limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible available for sale in select bookshops. The Government does not allow free public distribution of non-Muslim religious materials.

There are two sets of laws and courts with authority over marriage, inheritance, and family matters--one for Muslims and another for Jews. The family law courts are administered, depending on the law that applies, by Muslim and rabbinical authorities who are court officials. Parliament is responsible for any changes to these laws. The judges who preside over Islamic family law courts are trained in Shari'a (Islamic law) as it is applied in the country.

Rabbinical authorities administer Jewish family courts. Personal status matters as defined by the country's interpretation of Islamic law are applicable to all other citizens. Christians inherit according to civil law. Jews inherit according to Jewish religious law. There are no legal mechanisms that recognize the country's Christian community in the same way the state recognizes its Jewish community. Non-Muslims must formally convert to Islam before they can marry a Muslim or adopt children in the country.

On request, the Government provides special protection to Jewish community members, visitors, and institutions as well as the expatriate Christian community. Annual Jewish commemorations take place around the country, and Jewish pilgrims regularly visit holy sites. Members of the country's Jewish community are represented at high levels in the Government. One serves as an advisor to the King and another as an Ambassador at Large.

The Government continued training of female spiritual guides (mourchidaat), a program begun in 2006, in part to promote moderate Islam. The Government has stated that their training is exactly the same required of male imams. Their status is equal to the imams, although they do not deliver Friday sermons in mosques, do not lead group prayers, and focus much of their work on meeting various needs of other women. Since the inception of the program, more than 200 women have been trained and appointed to leadership positions in mosques and society, teaching religious subjects, providing counsel on a variety of subjects including women's legal rights and family planning, and providing management to programs in which men participate.

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA) monitors and provides guidance on Friday mosque sermons and the Qur'anic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppress the activities of religion-oriented political groups but generally tolerate activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. The Government requires that mosques close to the public shortly after daily prayer times to prevent use of the

premises for unauthorized political activity, and mosques comply. Only the Government can authorize the construction of new mosques, although most mosques are constructed using private funds.

There are occasional credible reports of unauthorized or informal mosques that authorities close down because they are suspected of sanctioning extremist religious activities or not complying with MEIA standards.

The Government does not recognize al-Adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Good Works, or AWI), an organization that rejects the king's spiritual authority. The AWI advocates an Islamic state, continues to organize and participate in political demonstrations, and operates websites, although the Government does not allow the public distribution of its published materials.

Government informers monitor mosques, university campuses, and religious activities, primarily those conducted by Islamists. Authorities also frequently monitor registered expatriate Christian church services and leadership meetings but do not interfere with their activities.

In the past, the Government has denied permanent residency to some non-Muslim religious clergy who are members of unregistered religious organizations and delayed according it to others.

The following Islamic holy days are national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Islamic New Year. Other religious groups observe their holy days without interference from government authorities.

Political parties founded on religious, ethnic, linguistic, or regional bases are prohibited by law. The Government permits several parties identified as "Islamic oriented" to operate, and some have attracted substantial support, including the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), the third largest party in Parliament.

The Government requires religious groups to register in order to undertake financial transactions and other business as private associations and legal entities. Registered churches and associations include the Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant, English Protestant, and Anglican Churches. During the reporting period, the Government did not license or approve new religious groups or religious organizations.

The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities of the major religious groups, namely Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

The Government's annual education budget funds the teaching of Islam in all public schools and Judaism in some public schools.

The Ministry of Culture cosponsored the rehabilitation of three of the country's most ancient synagogues in Fez. The Government also funds the study of Jewish culture and its artistic, literary, and scientific heritage at some universities. At the University of Rabat, Hebrew and comparative religion are taught in the Department of Islamic Studies. Throughout the country, approximately 13 professors teach Hebrew. The country is the only Arab nation with a Jewish museum.

The MEIA continues to fund a graduate-level theological course, part of which focuses on Christianity and Judaism, and another that trains both men and women to be counselors and teachers in mosques.

The Government does not require the designation of religion on passports or national identity documents, either explicitly or in code. It permits individuals to reflect their religious identity through clothing, but they must conform to cultural norms.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior continued to monitor proselytizing activities, especially those of Shi'a Muslims and Christians. On April 2, 2009, a government spokesman stated, "the Kingdom, whose foundations are grounded in Islam and the Sunni Maliki rite, can never tolerate serving as a hotbed for spreading Shi'ism and Christian proselytizing. The fight against Christian proselytizing in accordance with law cannot be considered among human rights abuses, for it is an action aimed at preventing attempts to undermine the country's immutable religious values. The freedom of belief does not mean conversion to another religion."

In March 2009 the Government seized Shi'a tracts and literature from libraries and bookstores throughout the country. There were also reports of hundreds of Shi'a Muslims being questioned by police about their faith and political affiliations. The Ministry of National Education shut down a private Iraqi school, operating in the country for more than 30 years, after allegations that the school was teaching Shi'a principles, a charge that school officials denied. Local media reported continued questioning of Shi'a Muslims in Casablanca throughout April 2009. Authorities claimed these measures were a reaction to a politicized Iranian Shi'ism that violated the country's laws against using religion for political purposes.

On November 10, 2008, the MEIA informed Parliament that it had signed an agreement with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) that gives the latter the power to "protect mosques as secure places of worship." Authorities stated that these measures have eliminated the exploitation of mosques for political propaganda, such as distributing pamphlets, raising funds for illicit organizations, and disseminating extremist ideas. Some local mosque leaders reported that this step has little or no affect on the majority of local Muslims who attend daily prayers. However, those who adhere to a non-Malikite form of Islam felt pressure from authorities not to voice publicly their religious ideas in local mosques. There were reports that those who did not conform to the Malikite majority were watched and followed closely in an effort to ensure they did not espouse extremist ideology.

The country joined Algeria and Tunisia in banning the October 30, 2008, edition of *L'Express International*, a French newsmagazine, stating that its cover story, "The Jesus-Mohammed Shock," offended Islam. The British Broadcasting Corporation quoted the country's information minister as saying that the issue breached article 29 of the country's press code but did not specify the precise content the Ministry regarded as offensive. The issue discussed the relationship between Christianity and Islam and featured a front cover image for the Moroccan market showing the Prophet Muhammad with his face covered, rather than exposed as on the French edition. Government officials stated, "Our country should not be used by anyone to spread articles that could be prejudicial to our religion or undermine public order."

In his September 27, 2008, address before the ordinary session of the Higher Council of Ulema, the King called for the formation of a national council of religious leaders who would work to ensure that citizens living in Europe are not swayed by radical or heretical ideas. It is believed that the ideas referred to include extremist Wahhabi teachings and Shi'a Islam.

In September 2008 the MEIA suspended six imams in the southern town of Taroudant for teaching what it deemed an unapproved and extreme form of Islam and, among other acts, for allowing the marriage of young girls. Subsequently, the Ministry closed the religious schools at which they taught. This followed the MEIA's closure of dozens of madrassas (religious schools) affiliated with an imam who sparked controversy with a fatwa that was interpreted to permit the marriage of girls as young as nine years old on the grounds that the decision encouraged pedophilia, which is criminalized by law. The imam took refuge in Saudi Arabia but later returned.

Members of the Berber community and other citizens, including some members of non-Muslim religious communities, complained of difficulty in registering children's names that were deemed "non-Muslim" by authorities. Most received permission, but only after a lengthy bureaucratic appeal process that sometimes lasted two years. After much discussion in the press, the Minister of Interior stated there was officially no restriction on names, but registration of non-traditional names remained difficult in practice.

During the reporting period, the AWI continued to evolve into more of a political rather than religious organization and maintained a relatively low profile. The Government continued to prohibit AWI from holding public meetings, referring to the organization as one using religion for political purposes. In January 2009 government authorities blocked several websites affiliated with the organization after they were used to organize sit-ins and demonstrations during a conflict transpiring between Israel and Gaza. Although the AWI is based upon a religious ideology, the authorities' actions to restrict its activities and prosecute its members were in response to political activities and did not represent restrictions on religious freedom per se.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In March 2009 authorities expelled five female non-resident foreigners, four Spanish and one German, and interrogated 12 others, 11 of them citizens, for participating in a women's Bible study held in a private apartment of a local Christian leader in Casablanca. The authorities detained the 12 women on March 28, released them early the following morning, and discretely returned them home in unmarked police cars. The authorities reportedly pressured the women to return to Islam, mocked their Christian faith, questioned why they left Islam to become

Christians, and asked if there were other Christians in their families. Agents of the police and security reportedly confiscated all the Bibles and other books that were stored in a room of the apartment--which is utilized as a stock room by the owner for his book shop--in addition to a computer and cellular phones. As of the end of the reporting period, the Government had returned only the cellular phones. The authorities reportedly accused the foreigners of proselytizing but did not officially charge anyone with committing a crime. On May 14, 2009, the Government reportedly denied entry to two of the Spanish women when they attempted to reenter the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including that of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government worked to counter extremist ideology in the name of religion by promoting religious tolerance.

During the reporting period, the MEIA continued to revise national school curriculums to remove passages and lessons that interpret Qur'anic passages in ways that incite hatred or disrespect women, other cultures, and other religions. Additionally, the Ministry's closed-circuit television network broadcasts approved religious messages and sermons to more than 2,000 mosques daily.

During the July 2008 Throne Day ceremony, the King granted national medals of appreciation to two prominent Jews of Moroccan origin. As part of the festivities marking the 1,200th anniversary of the founding of the city of Fez, government officials organized a conference in Casablanca in October 2008 to celebrate the contributions of Jews in the nation's history.

The Government continued to encourage tolerance, respect, and dialogue among religious groups. In March 2009 the country was instrumental in creating a new "Civil Alliance for Citizenship in the Arab World." This new alliance gathers several NGOs and personalities active on citizenship-related issues in the Arab world. It was created, in part, to promote political pluralism and religious, social, cultural, and linguistic diversity as sources of richness in Arab and Islamic societies. It also participated in a February 2009 conference to combat anti-

Semitism in London that brought together more than 300 legislators from 42 countries to champion tolerance throughout the world.

During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which corresponded to September 2008, the King hosted an annual colloquium of Muslim religious scholars from around the world, including the United States, which considered ways to promote moderate and peaceful religious interpretations and encouraged tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and with other religions.

The Government participates in the Alliance of Civilizations, the Anna Lindh Foundation (whose president is a Moroccan Jew), and other international groups that promote religious tolerance.

On May 29-June 6, 2009, the 15th annual "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which included musicians from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and other spiritual traditions, was held.

On April 18-25, 2009, the country hosted the 3rd annual Fez Festival of Sufi Culture. The festival celebrates the principles of tolerance, peace, and spirituality through music, art, discussions, and lectures. Another April cultural festival featured European Jewish music "from the stetl to New York."

On April 16-19, 2009, the 9th annual "Spring Musical of the Alizes" festival, featuring musicians and singers from the three monotheistic religions and different nationalities, was held in Essaouira.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination toward those with different religious beliefs, including converts from Islam to other religions. Free expression in religious matters is tolerated; however, society discourages public efforts to proselytize.

Jewish citizens openly practiced their faith and lived in safety throughout the country during the reporting period. Many citizens of all religions believe that the country is enriched by its centuries-old Jewish minority and were increasingly vocal expressing that view. Muslim citizens study at Christian and Jewish schools. Muslim students constitute the majority at Jewish schools in Casablanca, and a hospital run by the Jewish community provides care to low-income citizens regardless of religion.

The Muslim majority overwhelmingly accepts its Jewish citizens, and Jewish community leaders speak highly of the respect and acceptance they feel in the country. Government officials report that more than 25,000 Jewish tourists visit the country every year, many for pilgrimage to religious sites, and are generally welcomed. The Jewish community in the country was the focus of some isolated negative reactions during the Israel-Gaza conflict (December 27, 2008-January 21, 2009), but the situation normalized once the conflict ended.

During this reporting period, some Christian citizens reported that they were not allowed to rent villas in tourist areas for Christian-themed retreats, had their backpacks searched randomly by unidentified agents, had their passports confiscated by officials, and sometimes experienced extensive delays or refusals in attempts to renew passports. Local Christian leaders said that they believe they are constantly followed by authorities but that the rejection they experience comes mostly from family and friends and not the Government.

Many Muslims view the Baha'i faith as a heretical offshoot of Islam and consequently consider Baha'i apostates. Most members of the Baha'i community avoid disclosing their religious affiliation; however, concerns about their personal safety and property do not prevent their functioning in society, and some hold government jobs.

There is widespread consensus among Muslims regarding religious practices and interpretation. However, some dissenters challenge the religious authority of the King and call for the establishment of a government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam. The Government views such dissent as political rather than religious in nature, since critiques relate largely to the exercise of power.

Several interfaith associations, such as the Judeo-Rifian Association and the Islamic-Christian Research Group, promoted religious understanding to combat intolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government regularly discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of any religious group.

U.S. government officials met regularly with religious officials, including in the MEIA and other senior ministry officials, Muslim religious scholars, leaders of the Jewish community, Christian missionaries, the leaders of the registered Christian communities, and other local religious groups, including Muslim minorities. The U.S. government sponsored programs focusing on religious tolerance and freedom using the U.S. model.

U.S. government officials also met regularly with members of religious communities to promote tolerance and freedom. Officials actively promoted and facilitated meetings between the MEIA and visiting U.S. religious leaders.

MOZAMBIQUE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 308,642 square miles and a population of 21.7 million. According to the 1997 census, 24 percent are Roman Catholic, 22 percent are Protestant, 20 percent are Muslim, and one-third do not profess a religion or belief; however, religious leaders speculated that a significant proportion of this group practiced some form of indigenous religion, a category not included in the 1997 census. The South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim.

Christian groups include Anglican, Baptist, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Congregational, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, as well as various other evangelical, apostolic, and Pentecostal churches. The three principal Islamic organizations are the Mohammedan Community, Islamic Congress, and Islamic Council. There are small Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups.

Religious communities are dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coast, while areas of the northern interior have a stronger concentration of Christian communities. Christians are generally more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslims also live in these areas.

Muslim journalists report that the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a is not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims are much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they follow than as Sunni or Shi'a. There are significant differences between the practices of Muslims of African origin and those of South Asian origin. In addition, African Muslim clerics have increasingly sought training in Egypt, Kuwait, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia, returning with a more fundamental approach than the local traditional, Sufi-inspired Swahili Islam particularly common in the north.

Many small churches that have split from mainstream denominations fuse African indigenous beliefs and practices within a Christian framework. Some Muslims also continue to perform indigenous rituals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not officially favor a particular religion; however, Muslim leaders and journalists claimed tacit discrimination against the Muslim community. They cited the example of National Family Day, a holiday observed on December 25. Officially, there are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but some members of the Muslim community believe that Eid al-Fitr should be made a national holiday if Christmas is observed de facto under the guise of family unification.

The Government officially acknowledges the Eid festival by permitting Muslims to take leave on this day, with a presidential speech, and with other events. The Government recognizes Eid on a date identified by the South Asian community, in a perceived slight to black Muslims, who celebrate the festival on a different day.

The Constitution prohibits political parties from directly affiliating with a religion or church.

The Law on Religious Freedom requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, reveal their principal sources of funding, and provide the names of at least 500 followers in good standing. No

particular benefits or privileges are associated with registration, and there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious group during the reporting period. The Christian Council reported that not all religious groups register, but unregistered groups worship unhindered by the Government. There were 739 religious denominations and 162 religious organizations registered with the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. During the reporting period, four denominations and 11 religious organizations registered.

The Government routinely grants visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries. Like all foreign residents, missionaries face a somewhat burdensome process in obtaining legal residency; however, they generally conduct their activities without government interference.

The Constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and a more recent law permits them to own and operate schools, which are increasing in number. Religious instruction is the primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools. Universities associated with religious denominations do not offer religious studies; many students at Catholic University branches are Muslim, particularly in Pemba. Religious instruction in public schools is strictly prohibited.

The Catholic Church and some Muslim organizations are still in discussion with the Government regarding land seized from religious groups after independence. While the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial governments, the Directorate of Religious Affairs is mandated to address the general issue. The Papal Nunciature reported that the Government continued to occupy properties in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia Provinces that had been used for schools, seminaries, and residences, and that the Vatican had entered into negotiations with the Government for their restitution.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

While all major religious groups are represented in the National Assembly and government ministries, many Muslims felt underrepresented because Christians held the majority of leadership positions in the Government and media services.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

NAMIBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 320,827 square miles and a population of 2 million. More than 90 percent of the population identifies itself as Christian. The three largest Christian groups are the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches, while smaller numbers are affiliated with the Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal and evangelical (charismatic) churches, as well as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The number of Pentecostal churches is growing significantly. There are also a number of Zionist Churches (which practice a mixture of traditional African beliefs and Pentecostal Christianity), especially in urban areas. The Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia predominantly is made up of members of the Afrikaner ethnic group. The Himba, Herero, and San groups practice indigenous religions. There are also Muslims, Baha'is, Jews, and Buddhists; they reside primarily in urban areas. Muslims are almost exclusively Sunni and are predominantly immigrants or recent converts.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government does not formally recognize any religious group; however, religious organizations must register with the Ministry of Trade and Industry to receive tax exempt status or with local authorities to purchase land at a discounted rate.

There are some local registration requirements for religious organizations. For example, for a church to obtain land from the City of Windhoek, it needs to demonstrate that it has a constitution, registration with the Council of Churches, and sound financial management. The church must have at least 250 members and have been in operation for at least two years.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

NAURU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, some elements of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities occasionally voiced discomfort with religious groups viewed as unorthodox, in particular The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of eight square miles and a population of 9,300. Christianity is the primary religion. According to the 2002 census, approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestant, and the remainder are Catholic. The ethnic Chinese on the island, estimated to constitute approximately 5 percent of the population, may be Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or nonreligious. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons stated they had small numbers of followers in the country.

Foreign missionaries introduced Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There are a few active Christian missionaries, including representatives of Anglicanism, Methodism, Catholicism, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, until recently, other laws and policies restricted this right in some circumstances. Under the Constitution, the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and

association may be restricted by any law "which is reasonably required... in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health." The Government had in the past cited this provision as a basis for preventing foreign churches from proselytizing native-born citizens but did not do so during the reporting period.

There is no state religion.

The Government observes Christmas and Easter as official holidays.

The Government informed Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses leaders that under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance, their churches must register with the Government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building churches, holding religious services, and otherwise practicing their religion. The legal counsel for the Mormons asserted that while the ordinance in question permits the Government to recognize a religious denomination, it requires such recognition only if a denomination's ministers wish to solemnize marriages. Only the Catholic Church and two long-standing Protestant denominations, the Nauru Congregational Church and the Kiribati Protestant Church, are officially registered to operate. A small, breakaway Protestant congregation, catering principally to expatriate workers, is not registered. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives were allowed into the country and held religious services without interference by the Government. While they have not submitted a request for registration, they intend to do so in the near future. The Mormon Church reported that it submitted a registration request in 1999; however, the Government has not responded either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who were not allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Economic problems resulting from sharply declining income from the country's phosphate mining industry have led to social strains, and some elements of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities occasionally voiced discomfort with religious groups perceived as foreign, in particular the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. However, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses who visited the country stated they experience no social hostility.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain an embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the Government of Nauru. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Suva, Fiji, discuss religious freedom with the Government.

NEPAL

The interim Constitution, promulgated in January 2007, provides for freedom of religion; however, the interim Constitution specifically prohibits proselytizing.

The Government generally respected religious freedom during the reporting period, although on a few occasions it interfered with the practice of a religious group. The interim Constitution officially declared the country a secular state; however, the President, in his capacity as head of state, attended major Hindu religious ceremonies over which the King previously presided. No laws specifically affecting freedom of religion were amended. Members of minority religious groups occasionally reported police harassment. There was a marked increase in the harassment of the Tibetan community. Authorities stopped Tibetan religious gatherings with political overtones and arrested some participants. There was often substantial police presence at purely religious gatherings.

Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected places of worship, although there were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Those who converted to a different religious group occasionally faced violence and were ostracized socially but generally did not fear admitting their affiliations in public.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains regular contact with Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 54,363 square miles and a population of 29 million. According to the Government, Hindus constitute 86.51 percent of the population, Buddhists 7.79 percent, Muslims (the majority Sunni) 3.53 percent, and Christians and others 2.17 percent. Members of minority religious groups believe their numbers were significantly undercounted. Christian leaders conservatively estimated the number of their adherents at more than 1 million (3 percent). The National Churches Fellowship of Nepal reported an estimated 335 Christian churches operate in the Kathmandu Valley alone. According to a Jamme Masjid (mosque) official, there are at least 3,500 madrassahs.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The interim Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the religious practices of all groups; however, proselytizing is explicitly prohibited. The interim Parliament declared the country a secular state in the interim Constitution in January 2007.

The interim Constitution maintains the stipulation from the 1990 constitution that no one can be discriminated against based on caste. In 2002 the Government constituted a National Dalit Commission charged with protecting and promoting Dalit (formerly called "untouchable") rights and ensuring active participation of the Dalit community in the country's development. The Ministry of Local Development allocates money to the National Dalit Commission to cover daily administrative costs and to launch programs in the 75 districts. The Commission has branches in all districts. In each district, a Local Development Officer chairs the meetings of the local commissions. The Commission also coordinates with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in Dalit issues. The Commission submits an annual progress report to the Local Development Ministry. Despite the Commission's awareness programs, dalits continued to face discrimination and were often prevented by local villagers and Hindu priests from performing their religious rites or participating in cultural and religious festivals.

There are no specific laws favoring the Hindu majority, nor does the Government control the expression of Hinduism.

Although there are no registration requirements for religious groups, there are registration requirements for NGOs. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religious organizations claimed that, unless registered, they were prevented from owning land, an important step for establishing churches, mosques, synagogues, or burial sites. An organization that provides religious services and kosher food to Jewish adherents (generally tourists) complained that it was not able to register as a religious organization or to open an institute for Jewish studies.

Proselytizing is illegal. There are officially no foreign missionaries; however, for decades dozens of Christian missionary hospitals, welfare organizations, and schools have operated. These organizations did not proselytize and otherwise operated free of government interference. Missionary schools were among the most respected institutions of secondary education; many members of the

governing and business elite graduated from Jesuit high schools. Foreign workers in the missionary hospitals and schools entered the country with visas designating them as technical workers for local or international NGOs sponsoring the hospitals and schools. The Government enforced the immigration laws that provide for expelling any foreign workers found proselytizing. There were no expulsions during the reporting period. Many foreign Christian organizations had direct ties to local churches and sponsored pastors for religious training abroad.

Some holy days, most of them Hindu, are recognized as national holidays. These are Mahashivaratri, Falgun Purnima, Krishna Asthami, Dashain, Tihar, Maghi, and Chhath. Among the non-Hindu holidays celebrated are Lhosar (a Buddhist new year celebration observed on different dates by the Gurung and Tamang/Sherpa communities), Buddha Jayanti, Eid (Eid-al-Fitr), Christmas, and Ughauli (a Kirant ethnic/religious festival the Rai and Limbu communities celebrate).

Although public schools do not teach religious beliefs, most have a statue of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning, on their grounds. Some begin the day with a Hindu prayer to the goddess.

The Government has no formal policy on interfaith understanding. A local NGO, the Interreligious Council of Nepal, consisting of representatives of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Baha'i communities, is active in promoting peace in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Tibetan Buddhists faced various restrictions, including outright interference and often an intimidating police presence during their religious celebrations. Local authorities tolerated celebration of Tibetan religious festivals only on private property. During one religious event on private property for which advance permission had been obtained, police confiscated and burned a picture of the Dalai Lama. The Government mounted a campaign of steadily increasing intimidation against the Tibetan community, successfully shutting down protest activities and severely constraining even purely religious events.

Protests in the country that began with the March 2008 anniversary of the 1959 Lhasa uprising continued until September 2008, when authorities arrested and detained 130 protesters, eventually releasing some and turning the rest over to the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Tibetans who arrived or were born after December 31, 1989, do not have legal status and are therefore vulnerable to implicit threat of deportation. Over the course of the reporting period, Tibetans routinely faced harassment and extortion by police and other authorities. Extortion amounts rose, with notable and localized incidents of extortion demands at a level so high the Tibetan victims were forced out of business or had to cease professional activities.

The law prohibits proselytizing, which is punishable by fines, imprisonment, or, for foreigners, expulsion. Personal conversion is, however, allowed. Some Christian and Muslim groups were concerned that the ban on proselytism limited the expression of non-Hindu religious belief. NGOs or individuals were allowed to file reports that individuals or organizations were proselytizing, and the Government investigated these reports.

On December 28, 2008, the Maoist-led Government announced its decision to replace the Indian priests at Pashupatinath Temple, one of the largest, oldest, and holiest Hindu temples, by appointing two Nepali priests. Local citizens and Bhandaris (priests) protested, demanding that the Government revoke its decision. No ritual ceremonies could be offered at the shrine for two to three days due to the controversy. The Supreme Court issued a stay order, and the Government backed down. At the end of the reporting period, the case remained before the Supreme Court. Controversy over new rules regarding the qualifications for priests as well as their pay and benefits was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Madrassahs, but not mosques, were required to register with local district administration offices (part of the Home Ministry) and supply information about their funding sources. Some Muslim leaders criticized the policy as discriminatory; however, in practice the registration requirement was not enforced. According to the Department of Education, 832 madrassahs have been legally registered with the District Education Offices (DEOs); the DEOs have been providing a minimum of financial support annually to those that are legally registered. Depending on the number of students, the financial support ranged from \$26 (2000 Nepali Rupees) per student to \$81 (6200 Nepali Rupees) per student. The Department also prepared curricula for the registered madrassahs. Muslims were not restricted from participating in the Hajj; the Government did not subsidize the pilgrimage.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste; however, the caste system strongly influences society. Although the Government has stressed that caste-based discrimination is illegal and temple access for "lower castes" has

improved in some areas, caste discrimination was frequently practiced at Hindu temples, where some Hindu priests forbade Dalits from entering.

There were no restrictions on the sale or possession of religious literature.

Civil servants were permitted to take religious holidays and celebrate them on private property without government interference.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is a designated terrorist organization on both the U.S. Government's "Terrorist Exclusion List" of the Immigration and Nationality Act and under Executive Order 13224.

During most of the reporting period, Maoist ministers headed 12 ministries in the Government, including the Prime Ministry; the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare, which controls registration of NGOs; and the Ministry of Culture and State Restructuring.

In contrast with previous reporting periods, there were no reported incidents of Maoists restricting religious freedom in the country.

On May 23, 2009, three parishioners were killed and 13 others injured when a pressure cooker bomb exploded in a Catholic church in Kathmandu. The Hindu extremist National Defense Army claimed responsibility for the blast.

Investigations into the killing of Moid Khan, a local member of the Nepali Congress Party, and the subsequent communal violence that occurred in September 2007 ended when the Government decided to withdraw cases related to these incidents. A motion challenging the Government's decision remained before the courts at the end of the reporting period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected places of worship. Hindus generally respected the many Buddhist shrines located throughout the country; Buddhists accorded Hindu shrines the same respect. Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini, in the southern part of the country, is an important pilgrimage site, and his birthday is a national holiday.

On April 19, 2009, two Hindu priests in Kaski District were killed. According to police, 60-year-old Mukti Prasad Pokharel was disabled and 85-year-old Tarananda Paudel Giri was blind. Both were killed with sharp weapons. One person accused in the death of Pokharel was arrested and placed in custody. The name of one accused in Giri's death was released, but police reported they were looking for five others who were allegedly involved. According to police, neither killing was committed for religious reasons. Investigations were ongoing.

Some Christian groups reported that Hindu extremism has increased in recent years, especially after the 2006 Parliamentary declaration of the country as a "secular state" rather than a "Hindu Kingdom." Of particular concern were the local affiliates of the India-based Hindu political party Shiv Sena, locally known as Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal, and Nepal Shivsena. This group was suspected of playing a role in the violence during the reporting period. On December 28, 2008, another Hindu fundamentalist organization, Ranbir Sena, claimed responsibility for a low-intensity bomb set off outside Durbar High School in Kathmandu. No casualties resulted.

Some citizens were wary of proselytizing and conversion by Christians and viewed the growth of Christianity with concern.

Those who chose to convert to other religious groups, in particular Hindu citizens who converted to Islam or Christianity, were sometimes ostracized. They occasionally faced isolated incidents of hostility or discrimination from Hindu extremist groups. Some reportedly were forced to leave their villages. Although this prejudice was not systematic, it was occasionally violent. Nevertheless, converts generally were not afraid to state publicly their new religious affiliations.

Some organizations faced threats and extortion from Hindu extremist groups. Jains and other religious minorities faced abduction and extortion attempts from groups that claimed to be Hindu extremist but possibly were simply thugs and criminal gangs using religious cover for their activities.

On March 18, 2009, seven persons were injured when a bomb exploded in front of Maisthan Temple in Birgunj. According to police, five persons, including Raj Bahadur Gosain, the local head of the Terai Mukti Morcha (Terai Liberation Front), were arrested in connection with the blast but later released. No group claimed responsibility. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On October 4, 2008, unidentified assailants detonated a powerful bomb at a mosque in Morang District that injured four persons. No group claimed responsibility for the blast and no one had been arrested by the end of the reporting period.

On July 1, 2008, Father John Prakash, a Catholic priest and principal of Don Bosco school in Morang District, was killed. An armed group of men broke into the priests' residence, immobilized another priest, and killed Father Prakash after demanding money. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. A Hindu extremist group was active in the area and continued to issue threats and extortion demands aimed at Christian groups.

Although it is prohibited under the Constitution, the caste system has deep historical roots in Hinduism and maintained strong influence on society. Societal discrimination against members of lower castes, including Dalits, remained widespread, despite the Government's efforts to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes. Lower castes experienced discrimination in areas including education, employment, and marriage. Other religious communities did not practice caste discrimination. Entrance into Hindu temples was often restricted for persons not of South Asian ethnicity, who are unlikely to be Hindu. Better education and higher levels of prosperity, especially in the Kathmandu Valley, were slowly reducing caste distinctions and increasing opportunities for lower socioeconomic groups. Better-educated, urban-oriented castes continued to dominate politics, as well as senior administrative and military positions, and to control a disproportionate share of natural resources. Resistance to intercaste marriage remained high.

On August 16, 2008, during Jani Purnima festival, a priest, Dipak Upadhayay, of Dailekh District refused to perform a sacred Hindu rite that involved tying the sacred thread around the hand of a Dalit, Shanta Bahadur Bishwokarma. Bishwokarma and Janklal Sunar, a Dalit rights activist, filed a complaint at the district court demanding legal action against Upadhayay. On April 13, 2009, the

district court sentenced the local Brahmin priest to three months' imprisonment and fined him \$14 (1,000 Nepali Rupees) on the charge of practicing untouchability.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained contact with Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other religious groups. The Embassy closely monitored religious freedom and raised the issue with the Government when appropriate. The Embassy also repeatedly protested the Government's disproportionate response to peaceful protests by Tibetan Buddhists.

THE NETHERLANDS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Jews and Muslims faced instances of abuse during the reporting period, although the experiences of the two communities differed. The Government repeatedly condemned any form of anti-Semitism or anti-Islam activity and worked with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to combat such abuses.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 16,485 square miles and a population of 16.4 million. According to a 2006 report by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), approximately 51.6 percent of the population has some religious affiliation, although many do not actively practice their religious beliefs. Approximately 43.4 percent consider themselves Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant, including the Dutch Reformed Church, Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Remonstrants); 5.7 percent Muslim; and 2.3 percent other (Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist).

Society has become increasingly secularized. In general, church membership continued to decline. According to a 2006 study by the government's Social Cultural Planning Bureau, the number of persons who are church members declined steadily from 76 percent of the population in 1958 to 30 percent in 2006 (16 percent Catholic and 14 percent Protestant). Only 16 percent regularly attend church. Catholics constitute the largest religious group in the country.

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) estimated in 2007 there are 850,000 Muslims, constituting 5.2 percent of the population, primarily in the larger cities.

Approximately 373,000 are of Turkish background and 335,000 are of Moroccan background, according to 2008 CBS figures. Other Muslims are from the country's former colony of Suriname, and there are large numbers of asylum seekers from Muslim-dominant countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. Research released in May 2008 by the University of Groningen yielded an estimate of 200,000 practicing Muslims in the country; the estimate was based on, among other things, an analysis of attendance at mosques.

According to the Jewish Social Work organization, the country counts approximately 45,000 Jews, but the Stephen Roth Institute and the Council of Europe estimate the number at closer to 30,000. Less than one-quarter of Jews belong to active Jewish organizations.

According to the WRR, there are between 100,000 and 215,000 Hindus, of whom 85 percent originally came from Suriname and approximately 10 percent from India. The Hindu population also includes individuals from Uganda, as well as members of similar movements based on Hindu teachings such as Ramakrishna, Hare Krishna, Sai Baba, and Osho.

The Buddhist community has approximately 17,000 members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution permits the Government to place restrictions on the exercise of religious beliefs only on limited grounds, such as concern for health hazards, traffic safety, and risk of public disorder.

It is a crime to engage in public speech that incites religious, racial, or ethnic hatred, and the Government prosecuted several cases during the reporting period. Convictions are rare, however, because courts are reluctant to restrict freedom of expression, especially when it concerns expressions that "offend, shock, or disturb" made by politicians or journalists within the context of public debate. For example, on June 30, 2008, the Amsterdam prosecutor's office announced that it would not prosecute politician and Islam critic Geert Wilders despite dozens of complaints about his statements in the press and his "Fitna" movie, which many considered offensive to Muslims. However, since he made them within the context

of the public debate on Islam, they are not considered to constitute a criminal offense, according to the prosecutor, nor was Wilders considered guilty of inciting hatred against Muslims.

However, on January 21, 2009, the Amsterdam Appellate Court granted an injunction filed by several organizations and private persons and ordered the Amsterdam prosecutor's office to initiate criminal proceedings. The court found that Wilders' anti-Islam statements yielded "a reasonable suspicion of guilt," thus requiring review by a criminal judge. The court recognized the paramount importance of the right to freedom of opinion but noted that right is not unlimited. It found incitement to hatred so serious that it is in the general interest to clearly define what constitutes speech inciting religious hatred, particularly in political debate.

On March 10, 2009, the Supreme Court gave a restrictive interpretation to the offense of a public statement that is "intentionally insulting to a group of people because of their religion." Lower courts had convicted a man for displaying a poster with the text "Stop the tumor that is called Islam." They found the poster "unnecessarily offensive" towards Islam and Muslims. The Supreme Court disagreed, however, because criminal law does not penalize offensive statements about a religion, even if the statements offend the religious feelings of supporters of the religion.

The Government provides education funding to public and religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. To qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious criteria in curriculum, minimum class size, and health care.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Christmas as national holidays.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, the law recognizes the existence of religious denominations and grants them certain rights and privileges, including tax exemptions. Although the law does not formally define what constitutes a "religious denomination" for these purposes, religious groups generally have not experienced any problem in meeting the definition.

The Government of Turkey exercises influence within the country's Turkish Muslim community through its religious affairs directorate, the Diyanet, which is

permitted to appoint imams for most of the more than 200 Turkish mosques in the country. There is no such arrangement with the Moroccan Government, which maintains connections with the approximately 150 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies but has no mechanism to exercise direct influence in the country. Authorities continued to express concern regarding Turkish and Moroccan interference with religious and political affairs, because such interference appeared to run counter to government efforts to encourage integration of Muslims into society.

To reduce undesired foreign influence, the Government continued to subsidize universities providing training for residents interested in becoming imams, in order to ensure that they have a basic understanding of local social norms and values. Selected universities cooperated with the main Muslim organizations on designing training programs. The Government continued to require all imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Islamic countries to complete a year-long integration course before permitting them to practice in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Disputes arose when the exercise of the rights to freedom of religion and speech clashed with the strictly enforced ban on discrimination. Such disputes were addressed either in the courts or by antidiscrimination boards. Complaints were repeatedly filed against religious or political spokesmen who publicly condemned homosexuality; however, longstanding jurisprudence dictates that such statements, when made on religious grounds, do not constitute a criminal offense absent an intention to offend or discriminate against homosexuals.

The Equal Opportunities Committee and the courts repeatedly addressed the wearing of headscarves in schools and places of employment. Prevailing jurisprudence takes the view that any restriction on wearing headscarves in such venues should be limited and based on security or other narrow grounds. In practice, headscarves were permitted almost everywhere, including in schools. In 2005-06, the Parliament adopted a resolution urging the Government to ban public wearing of burqas. In 2008 the Minister of Internal Affairs announced that the Government would not impose a generic ban on the public wearing of face-covering clothing, but it introduced such a ban for teachers, parents, and students

in the school setting, and for government officials who interact regularly with the public.

In other areas, antidiscrimination boards have publicly rebuked employers for failure to allow Muslim women to wear headscarves. On the other hand, on May 11, 2009, the country's highest administrative court ruled that a school may require a female teacher to shake hands with men in greeting, even if this infringes on her religious beliefs. A Dutch school teacher was fired in 2006 after informing fellow teachers that, due to religious reasons, she would no longer shake hands with men. The court determined the school's interest in preparing minority students for the labor market, including the practice of customary social conventions, outweighs the teacher's claims of protection against discrimination on religious grounds.

The law permits employees to refuse to work on Sunday for religious reasons; however, depending on the work's nature, such as health sector employment, employees may be denied such an exception.

In 2006 a court order prohibited the Government from subsidizing the orthodox Protestant Political Reformed Party (SGP), which did not accept female members on theological grounds. The SGP responded by permitting women to become members, and the authorities reinstated the subsidy following a ruling by the Council of State, the country's highest administrative court. However, the SGP continued to deny women the right to run for office, and several NGOs appealed, arguing that the party must allow women to seek office. The SGP responded that to do so would interfere with religious freedom and freedom of association and that the party's female members were not seeking to run for office. In December 2007 the Hague Appellate Court ruled that the SGP was in violation of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and that the Government was therefore obliged to require the SGP to change its policy. At the end of the reporting period, both the SGP and the Government had appeals pending with the Supreme Court.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2008 the Government began a four-year, \$38 million (€26 million) outreach campaign to schools and neighborhoods to counter anti-Muslim sentiments, Islamic extremism, and right-wing nationalism. These efforts raised public awareness and triggered debate, but concerns about the policy's effectiveness remained.

The Government regularly told prosecutors and the police to give proper attention to incidents of discrimination. In March 2009 Parliament adopted a law obliging all local governments to create antidiscrimination units. The Government followed up with a campaign to encourage victims to report incidents of discrimination. The Government also took measures to deal more effectively with discrimination and incitement to hatred on the Internet; however, critics charged that law enforcement agencies could do considerably more.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Jews and Muslims faced instances of abuse during the reporting period, although the experiences of the two communities differed. The Government repeatedly condemned any form of anti-Semitism or anti-Islam activity, and it worked with NGOs to combat such abuses.

Certain groups opposed to Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories, such as the Arab European League and the Stop the Occupation Movement, frequently used anti-Semitic language and images to express political views. Explicitly anti-Semitic sentiments also prevailed among certain segments of the Muslim community and among fringe nationalist and neo-Nazi groups. In recent years, the overall number of incidents has tended to decrease, and "serious incidents" were rare. However, the frequency of incidents appeared to be correlated with the political situation in the Middle East. For example, incidents sharply increased during the December 2008-January 2009 Israeli intervention in Gaza. During subsequent anti-Israel demonstrations in various Dutch cities, some individuals chanted the slogan "Hamas, Hamas, Jews should be gassed." Police made several arrests and a dozen persons were convicted, including four minors who were then ordered to visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam.

The Registration Center for Discrimination on the Internet (MDI) noted that right-wing extremists were largely responsible for anti-Semitic expressions on the

Internet. MDI identified several hundred right-wing websites as extremist, including those of Stormfront, Polinico, National Alliance, and Holland Hardcore. The sites targeted not only Jews but also Muslims, blacks, and homosexuals. The Government took legal action against four right-wing websites. For example, on Feb 2, 2009, a judge convicted the former leader of the National Alliance of not removing discriminatory texts offensive to Jews and Muslims from the organization's website.

The Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) pushed for more action against anti-Semitic Internet sites, describing the Internet as one of the main tools for dissemination of anti-Semitic and racist ideologies.

Muslims faced societal resentment, attributable to growing perceptions that Islam is incompatible with Western values, that Muslim immigrants have failed to integrate, and that levels of criminal activity among Muslim youth are higher than the national average. Major incidents of violence against Muslims were rare; however, minor incidents including intimidation, brawls, vandalism, and graffiti with abusive language were common.

The eighth "Monitor Racism and Extremism" report, published by the University of Leiden and the Anne Frank Foundation in December 2008, reported a decrease in incidents of racism and right-wing extremist violence from 259 in 2006 to 223 in 2007. However, Muslims and Islamic institutions were more often targeted (an increase from 62 to 82 incidents). The report cited the painting of racist slogans, vandalism and attempted arson at mosques, and the beating up of young Muslims by skinheads.

The Public Prosecutor's National Discrimination Expertise Center (LECD) was set up to optimize the criminal processing of discrimination cases. In 2007 (latest available figures), it registered 216 newly reported offenses of discrimination (which approximates the annual average over the past decade). The offenses were discrimination based on race (67 percent) and religion (anti-Semitism, 19 percent; and anti-Islam, 7 percent.) In 2007, 207 offenses were dealt with, leading to 140 indictments and 29 out-of-court settlements. There were 89 convictions.

A number of outspoken right-wing politicians openly argued that Islam was incompatible with the country's traditions and social values. Geert Wilders, leader of the Party of Freedom (PVV), which held nine out of 150 seats in Parliament, advocated an anti-immigrant and anti-Islam platform. Wilders was the most

prominent of several politicians seen as encouraging public opinion against Muslims by claiming that Islam preaches violence and hatred.

On May 13, 2008, police detained for questioning for 30 hours a cartoonist who used the pseudonym of Gregorius Nekschot (deathblow) in connection with several cartoons that the prosecutor believed violated the law on intentional discrimination and incitement to hatred against persons based on their religious beliefs. Some politicians and commentators criticized this action as an inappropriate attempt to curtail freedom of expression, an accusation which the Justice Minister denied. Legal experts dismissed the chance of successful prosecution as minimal. The prosecutor had not decided whether to prosecute by the end of the reporting period.

CIDI works with the Islamic School Boards Organization and Platform Islamic Organizations Rijnmond on projects promoting a dialogue between Jews and Muslims, and it states that these projects resulted in a significant decrease in serious forms of anti-Semitism. CIDI also works with the Anne Frank Foundation and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies on education projects focused on the Holocaust. The Article 1 National Association against Discrimination set up several projects at elementary, secondary, and vocational training schools to counter racism and discrimination.

The labor federations worked to include stipulations in collective bargaining agreements that permit non-Christian employees to take leave on non-Christian holy days. Such stipulations were included in most labor agreements.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In addition, it continued to engage in dialogue with all major religious groups.

NEW ZEALAND

The law provides for freedom of religion and contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an island nation with an area of 103,000 square miles and a population of 4.3 million. According to 2006 census data, percentages of religious affiliation are: Anglican, 14.8 percent; Roman Catholic, 13.6 percent; Presbyterian, 10.7 percent; Methodist, 3.3 percent; other Protestant denominations, 8.2 percent; Christian (no affiliation specified), 5 percent; Buddhist, 1.7 percent; Hindu, 1.7 percent; and Muslim, 1 percent. Over 90 additional religious groups together constituted less than 1 percent of the population. In addition, 34.7 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation.

The indigenous Maori (estimated at 15 percent of the population) tend to be followers of Presbyterianism, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian groups such as Ratana and Ringatu. The Auckland area, which accounts for approximately 33 percent of the country's population, is home to the greatest religious diversity.

While the country is predominantly Christian, recent trends indicate that it is becoming more religiously diverse. According to the 2006 census, approximately 56 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian, a 5 percent decrease from the 2001 census. Within the Christian community, Anglicans and Presbyterians exhibited a decline between 2001 and 2006, while the number of self-identified Pentecostals and "Evangelical, Born Again, and Fundamentalist Christians"

increased by 17.8 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively. Syncretistic Maori Christian churches such as Ratana and Ringatu also experienced significant growth, and the proportion of Roman Catholics and Methodists grew slightly. During the same period, non-Christian religious groups continued to show steady growth rates, driven primarily by immigration.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion and contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Providing that religious practices do not breach the peace, religious expression is unrestricted.

During the reporting period, the government-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC) continued implementation of its Statement on Religious Diversity published in February 2007, which aims to guarantee equal treatment under the law of all faiths, the right to safety for religious individuals and communities, freedom of religious expression, the right to recognition and reasonable accommodation for religious groups, and the promotion of understanding in education. To this end, the Commission facilitated a national interfaith network with a monthly electronic newsletter and held its annual Interfaith Policy Forum in March 2009.

The Education Act of 1964 specifies in its "secular clause" that teaching within public primary schools "shall be entirely of a secular character"; however, it also permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools within certain parameters. If the school committee in consultation with the principal or head teacher so determines, any class may be closed at any time of the school day within specified limits for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors. However, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory. According to the Ministry of Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of individual school boards. The Ministry does not keep data on how many schools permit religious instruction or observances; however, the curriculum division stated that religious instruction, if provided at a school, usually was scheduled after normal school hours.

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act of 1975, the Government, in response to financial difficulties experienced by a large group of Catholic parochial schools, permitted the incorporation of private schools into the public school

system. Designated as "state integrated schools," they are deemed to be of a "special character" and receive public funding. Enrollment priority is given to "preference" students who share the special character of the school (for example Catholic students desiring to enroll in a Catholic school). State integrated schools also admit non-preference students (for example, non-Catholics in a Catholic school), but a student cannot be required to attend a state integrated school; admission is voluntary. As of July 2008, there were 328 state integrated schools.

On March 26, 2009, the police released a new edition of "A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity" as a guide for its officers. The publication contains information on various faiths and religious practices in the country and is designed to assist police in working within diverse religious communities. The guide also sets out basic human rights principles concerning religious diversity.

During the reporting period, the HRC received 1,225 complaints having an element of unlawful discrimination under the Human Rights Act. Of these complaints, 57 (5 percent) were classified as unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief or lack of religious belief. This percentage is generally consistent with the proportion of complaints relating to religion since 2005.

In the event that a complaint to the HRC is not resolved satisfactorily with the assistance of HRC mediation, the complainant may proceed to the Human Rights Review Tribunal. The Tribunal has the authority to issue restraining orders, award monetary damages, or declare a breach of the Human Rights Act (which is reported to Parliament). During the reporting period, the Tribunal did not issue any decisions relating to religious discrimination, nor were any such cases pending.

Conduct that is prohibited by the Human Rights Act may also be prosecuted under other laws. Therefore, in addition to the dispute resolution mechanism offered by the HRC, a complainant may initiate proceedings in the court system. According to the Department of Justice, there were no such proceedings considered by the courts during the reporting period.

The Government does not require the licensing or registration of religious groups. However, if a religious group desires to collect money for any charitable purpose, including the advancement of its religion, and wishes to obtain tax benefits, then it must register with the Inland Revenue Department as a charitable trust. There is no fee for this registration.

The country has three registered Christian-associated political parties. There are no other religiously affiliated parties, although the law does not prevent the registration of parties based on other religions.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Some businesses were fined up to \$600 (NZ\$1,000) if they attempted to operate on the official holidays of Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or Christmas Day. The Government prosecuted 32 businesses for violations of this law during the reporting period. The Government exempts businesses providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no instances of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In October 2007 six Jewish gravestones in the Wellington Karori Cemetery were desecrated with swastikas and anti-Semitic epithets. No one had been charged in the incident and the investigation remained open at the end of the reporting period.

There were several demonstrations against Israeli policies in early 2009, but none appeared to be directed against Judaism or Jewish persons.

Incidents of religiously motivated violence are extremely rare, and none were reported to the HRC or in the news media during the reporting period.

The HRC actively promoted religious tolerance. In addition to its efforts to implement its Statement on Religious Diversity, the HRC maintains an ongoing Diversity Action Program, of which respect for religious diversity is a pillar.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities and included them at sponsored events when appropriate. The Embassy maintained ongoing, open dialogue with all local interlocutors on the topics of religious freedom, tolerance, diversity, and related issues.

NICARAGUA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. However, the Government showed increasing intolerance toward religious groups and others that commented on sociopolitical matters.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 49,998 square miles and a population of 5.7 million. More than 80 percent of the population belongs to Christian groups. Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion. According to the latest census conducted in 2005 by the governmental Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census, 58.5 percent of the population is Catholic and 21.6 percent is evangelical Protestant, including Assemblies of God, Pentecostal, Mennonite, and Baptist. The most recent 2009 public opinion survey from the private polling firm M&R Consultants indicates that 54.4 percent of the population is Catholic and 27.7 percent evangelical. Both Catholic and evangelical leaders view these results as inaccurate. Based on other sources, the Catholic Church believes that approximately 70 percent of the population is Catholic, and some evangelical groups believe approximately 35 percent of the population is evangelical. The Assemblies of God claims to be the largest evangelical denomination, with more than 860 churches and 200,000 baptized members. Small religious groups include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Moravian Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baha'is, the Church of Scientology, and Buddhists.

Non-Christian communities are few and small. Although the Jewish community numbers only 40 permanent members (including expatriates), visitors often join them for holy days. Although small in number, the Jewish community is heterogenous and includes members from a variety of countries of origin. It does not have an ordained rabbi or synagogue, primarily due to lack of resources.

There are approximately 500 Muslims, mostly Sunnis, who are resident aliens or naturalized citizens from the Occupied Territories, Libya, and Iran. The Islamic Cultural Center in Managua serves as the primary prayer center for Muslims in the city. The Muslim community is building a mosque in Managua; Granada, Masaya, and León have smaller prayer centers in homes.

Immigrant groups include Palestinian Christians, whose ancestors came to Central America in the early 1900s, and Chinese, many of whom arrived as Christians or converted to Christianity. Some immigrant communities, including South Koreans, formed their own Protestant churches. In 2008, the first native-born Buddhist nun was announced; a Buddhist Center has existed in the country since 2000.

There are no longer any pre-Columbian religions known to be actively practiced in the country. Some Moravian churches along the Atlantic Coast continued to allow indigenous Amerindian spiritual expression, often through music. The Catholic Church frequently incorporated syncretic elements.

Moravian, Episcopalian, Catholic, and Baptist communities are the main traditional religious groups associated with the Atlantic coast, while Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches dominate the Pacific and central regions where the majority of the population resides. There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion along the Atlantic Coast, which has a higher concentration of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean populations. Amerindians and Creoles, for example, are more likely to belong to the Moravian or Episcopalian Churches; however, both churches reported losing some adherents to the growing evangelical movement. Some evangelical churches enjoy a strong presence in the remote towns of the central south Atlantic region. Smaller evangelical churches increased in rural areas of the interior and areas where the Catholic Church was not present.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution also states that no one "shall be obligated by coercive measures to declare their ideology or beliefs." The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.

There is no official state religion. The Catholic Church traditionally enjoyed close relationships with past governments due to its historical presence, but the dominance of the Catholic Church does not have a negative effect on religious freedom. It is the most politically active religious group and wields significant influence. Some religious groups reported the Government's increasing support for certain evangelical groups linked to the governing Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) political party, and there were reports of preferential treatment to these party-affiliated groups in the distribution of state funds. In a September 28, 2008, speech (prior to the November 2008 municipal elections), President Ortega promised to suspend any government fines levied against evangelical churches. He stated, "To fine these groups is to fine God, and you can't fine God."

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas as national holidays. The Festival of Santo Domingo (August 1 and 10) is also celebrated, but only in Managua. Many cities and towns also celebrate their patron saint's day.

The Government's requirements for legal recognition of a religious group are similar to requirements for other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A group must apply for "personeria juridica" (legal standing), which the National Assembly must approve. Following approval, the group must register with the Ministry of Government as an association or foundation. Groups that do not register cannot obtain tax-exempt status (exoneration) and technically cannot incur legal obligations or enter into contracts.

Goods donated to established churches and other registered nonprofit religious organizations that are intended for the exclusive use of the church or organization are eligible for tax exoneration. Groups must receive approval from the Office of External Cooperation of the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Office, and the municipality where the donated goods would be used before a tax exemption may be approved and the goods released. Because of perceived unequal treatment of different religious groups, exoneration remained a contentious issue, particularly regarding exemption from customs duties on imported goods and eligibility for tax exemption on the purchase of vehicles.

Some churches and other nonprofit religious organizations reported delays in obtaining customs exemptions. A tax equity law, designed to facilitate the process, required all groups to requalify for exoneration. Many churches and other nonprofit religious organizations reported that the law generally streamlined the process. Some evangelical church-affiliated NGOs claimed they were denied

certain exoneration privileges because the Government applied the law to churches only, rather than extending the benefit to religious-affiliated organizations operating nonprofit social services.

The law does not prohibit the use of religious symbols. The Government attempted to use religious symbols for political purposes. From September 2008 to April 2009 the government-sponsored and FSLN-affiliated Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) continually occupied, without legal authorization, the rotundas of Managua in a campaign entitled "prayer against hatred--love is stronger than hate." In this campaign, the CPCs first appropriated evangelical symbols followed by Catholic symbols, including placing statues of the Virgin Mary in rotundas, in an attempt to attract wider support for the governing party.

Missionaries were required to obtain religious worker visas, which were routinely provided; however, the process, which must be completed before the missionary arrives, continued to take several months.

Religion is not taught in public schools, but private religious schools operate and accept students of all religious affiliations. The Government provides financial support to a number of Catholic and Protestant-affiliated primary and secondary schools by paying teacher salaries. There were reports that the Government substantially reduced subsidies to the Catholic Church, which the Church had used to provide education in schools in remote regions of the Atlantic Coast. The Government directly funds two Catholic universities. Evangelical churches operated five private universities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. However, the Government showed increasing intolerance toward religious groups and others that commented on sociopolitical matters.

Following the November 2008 municipal elections, domestic and international civil society organizations, media organizations, and the private sector reported widespread irregularities with the local contests. The Episcopal (Bishops') Conference of the Catholic Church joined these groups in denouncing the irregularities and called for a resolution. As a result of its public stance, the Government attempted to discredit or promote intolerance toward the Church's hierarchy.

On April 30, 2009, the Government distributed electronically a letter from a presidential advisor that alleged the Vatican criticized the Catholic Church in the country and members of its clergy, calling the bishops corrupt and having lax morals. On May 5, 2009, the Government denied responsibility for the letter and accused computer hackers of disseminating it.

On April 6, 2009, Attorney General Estrada reported that he was the victim of an "attempted assassination" when unknown assailants "shot at him." Estrada blamed the "attempted assassination" on bishops of the Catholic Church, stating that some bishops were inciting violence by mentioning that groups were beginning to arm themselves as a result of the November 2008 electoral irregularities and the aftermath. The Government's Human Rights Ombudsman supported Estrada's claim in his public statement entitled *Secular or Religious Terrorism is Treason Against Nicaragua*, which argued that opposition politicians and Church leaders should accept the results of the elections and stop promoting violence. The police investigation and media reports later indicated that Estrada was likely the victim of common street crime and his injury the result of a scratch rather than a gunshot.

In November and December 2008, the Government, through media organizations affiliated with the governing party, attempted to foster intolerance toward the Church's hierarchy based on the Catholic bishops' public statements on the election irregularities. Government-affiliated media characterized the Church as selling out for money and being part of a conspiracy to destabilize the Government and the country.

There was no evidence of discrimination by the Government against members of religious groups; however, some groups reported difficulties in conducting community service programs. They reported that CPC approval for community activities was required (in practice if not in law), but was contingent on participation in CPC activities.

Religious groups reported that the controversial 2006 amendment to the Law against Special Crimes against the Environment and Natural Resources, also known as the "noise law," was not enforced in practice. The law ostensibly prohibits noise pollution near hospitals, clinics, and schools, and noise that exceeds the maximum safe level established by the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization. Pentecostals regarded the law as a restriction of their form of worship. By contrast, citizen rights and environmental groups charged that the elevated noise levels disrupted neighborhoods and caused psychological and physical damage.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

On January 7, 2009, demonstrators in Managua protested the conflict in Gaza, removing the statue of a menorah on Jerusalem Avenue and replacing it with the Palestinian flag. Previously, on December 28, 2008, President Ortega publicly exhorted Israel to "stop the criminal acts" in Gaza, and government-affiliated media referred to Israel as "fascist" and its acts as "genocide."

Following the November 2008 elections, vandals desecrated statues of the Virgin Mary that the CPCs had installed in the rotundas during their "prayer against hatred" campaign. Civil society groups attributed the vandalism to criticism by the Catholic bishops of the Government's conduct of the elections.

Relations among religious groups differed between the two coasts. There was a strong ecumenical presence on the Atlantic coast, attributed to the long history and mutual respect of four predominant Christian groups (Moravian, Episcopalian, Catholic, and Baptist). On the Pacific coast and in the central regions, ecumenism was less common and competition existed between the Catholic and evangelical churches.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain regular dialogue and outreach with the principal leaders of diverse religious groups, church officers, and faith-based organizations in the country to discuss religious freedom concerns.

NIGER

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Although the Minister of Religious Affairs attempted to ban religious speech he considered threatening to public order, the Government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 490,000 square miles and a population of 15.4 million. Islam is practiced by more than 98 percent of the population. Approximately 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni and 5 percent are Shi'a. There are also small communities of Christians and Baha'is. Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, account for fewer than 2 percent of the population and are present mainly in the regions of Maradi and Dogondoutchi, and in Niamey and other urban centers with expatriate populations. Adherents of Christianity include local believers from colonial families as well as immigrants from neighboring coastal countries, particularly Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Numbering a few thousand, Baha'is reside primarily in Niamey and in communities on the west side of the Niger River, bordering Burkina Faso. A small percentage of the population practices indigenous religious beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Government generally respected this right in practice, although it monitors

religious expression it views as potentially threatening to public order or national unity.

Traditional chiefs and senior Muslim clergy asserted a right to approve sermon content and mosque building plans by foreign Muslim preachers and donors. However, in practice this assertion did not appear to impede foreign clergy and organizations, whose doctrine often differed from the traditional Sufi teachings of mainline clergy and chiefs.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA), created in March 2007, promotes interfaith dialogue and elicits religious viewpoints on government policies and programs. The Niger Islamic Council (CIN), established in February 2006 and composed of representatives from Muslim organizations and government agencies, reports to the MRA.

In November 2007 the Government decided to regulate Hajj preparations, citing flawed organization of the Hajj by various local travel agencies.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Lailat al-Qadr, Eid el-Adha, Muharram, and Christmas. It is not uncommon for Muslims and Christians to attend each other's festivities during these holidays.

The Constitution forbids political parties from having a platform based on any religious ideology.

Religious organizations must register with the Ministry of the Interior. Registration is a formality, and there is no evidence that the Government favors one religious group over another or that it ever refused to register a religious organization. Approval is based on submission of required legal documents and the vetting of organization leaders. The Government must also authorize construction of any place of worship; however, there were no reports that the Government refused construction permits during the reporting period. Foreign missionaries must be registered officially as associations.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the Minister of Religious Affairs attempted to ban religious speech he considered threatening to public order, the Government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

On March 17, 2009, the Minister of Religious Affairs issued a statement on national radio and television banning "parallel preaching"--preaching in mosques occurring at the same time as authorized imams' sermons--and preaching in markets or other "inappropriate locations." Although citing the value of religious freedom, the Minister also banned radio and television broadcasts of religious sermons or discussions likely to generate contention, threaten public order, or undermine the cohesion of the country's Muslim community. However, the practice of parallel preaching continued, and there were no reports that the Government attempted to enforce the Minister's proclamations.

On March 11, 2009, the CIN expressed an intent to regulate religious sermons by requiring the CIN's prior approval of any preaching sessions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The CIN organized seminars to harmonize Islamic holy days and avoided a repeat of the October 2007 incidents when police harassed or detained local leaders for celebrating Eid al-Fitr two days later than the Government's announced Eid date.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

On March 3, 2009, in Niamey two Muslim sects--Ahli Sunna and Kala Kato--engaged in a heated confrontation over interpretation of Islamic doctrine. The police dispersed the crowd and briefly detained several protagonists.

On February 24, 2009, the Catholic Church in Niamey conducted an evaluation of its training that promoted interfaith sensitivity and dialogue. Evaluators recommended continued dissemination of positive values shared by Christians and Muslims and called on religious leaders to continue educating people to avoid behavior and language likely to sow discord.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy regularly emphasized the importance of religious tolerance in its public statements, in its visiting scholar and speaker programs, and in meetings with government officials and members of civil society.

NIGERIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Twelve northern states use Shari'a courts to adjudicate criminal and civil matters for Muslims and common law and customary law courts to adjudicate cases involving non-Muslims.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although local political actors stoked sectarian violence with impunity.

Violence, tension, and hostility between Christians and Muslims increased, particularly in the Middle Belt, exacerbated by indigene/settler laws, discriminatory employment practices, and resource competition.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and improve interreligious relations. The Ambassador and other U.S. mission staff assumed an active role in discussing and advocating these issues with government, religious, civil society, and traditional leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 356,700 square miles and a population of 149 million. While some groups estimate the population to be 50 percent Muslim, 40 percent Christian, and 10 percent practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs, it is generally assumed that the proportions of citizens who practice Islam and citizens who practice Christianity are roughly equal and include a substantial number who practice indigenous religious beliefs alongside Christianity or Islam. The predominant form of Islam is Sunni; however, there is an emerging Shi'a minority. The Christian population includes Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and a growing number of evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The north, dominated by the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups, is predominantly Muslim. Significant Christian communities have resided and intermarried with Muslims in the north for more than 50 years, however. Both Muslims and Christians reside in large numbers in the Middle Belt, including the

Federal Capital Territory (FCT). In the southwest, where the Yoruba ethnic group predominates, Christians and Muslims reside in equal numbers. While most Yorubas practice either Christianity or Islam, the practice of traditional Yoruba religious beliefs continues. Southern ethnic groups are predominantly Christian. In the east, where the Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists are the majority, although many Igbos continue to observe traditional rites and ceremonies in tandem with Christianity. In the oil-rich and restive Niger Delta region, where the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups prevail, Christians are the majority, with an estimated 1 percent of the population adhering to Islam. Members of the Ahmadiyya Movement maintain a presence in Lagos and Abuja.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The Constitution (Section 10) mandates that the Government "shall not adopt any religion as State Religion." The Government occasionally places limits on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

There are 36 states; state governors enjoy significant autonomy in decision-making and derive substantial resources subject to oversight from the national Government. State legislatures possess significant discretion to develop and promulgate legislation, although disagreements have arisen over the past several years about the limits to that autonomy.

The Constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting a state religion or giving preferential treatment to any religious or ethnic community.

The Constitution provides that states may establish courts based on the common law or customary law systems. Twelve northern states (Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, Zamfara, and Gombe) maintain Shari'a courts, which adjudicate both criminal and civil matters, alongside common law and customary law courts. Many Christians allege that having Shari'a courts amounts to the adoption of Islam as a state religion. In addition, the Nigerian Civil Liberties Organization contends that Zamfara State promotes Islam as a state religion through its establishment of a Commission for Religious Affairs.

While the Constitution specifically recognizes Shari'a courts for civil matters, it does not address the application of Shari'a to criminal matters. Aggrieved parties have the right to appeal judgments of the Shari'a courts in three levels of Shari'a appellate courts. Cases that reach the Shari'a Court of Appeal (the highest level of the Shari'a courts) can then theoretically be appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal before finally terminating at the Supreme Court. No case involving the Shari'a criminal code has reached the Federal Court of Appeal, however, and the court has not rendered a judgment on the issue of constitutionality of Shari'a court jurisdiction over criminal matters.

The Constitution (Sections 262.2 and 277.2) technically does not permit non-Muslims to consent to Shari'a legal jurisdiction, but in practice non-Muslims sometimes choose to have cases heard in Shari'a courts, which are typically faster and less expensive than common law courts.

In Zamfara State, a Shari'a court must hear all criminal cases involving Muslims. Other states that use the Shari'a legal system, including Niger and Kano, permit Muslims to choose common law courts for criminal cases. Civil society groups alleged that some Qadis (Shari'a court judges) apply harsher penalties in adultery and fornication cases against women than in commensurate cases against men and require stronger evidence to convict men than to convict women.

There are no laws that bar women or any groups from testifying in common law courts or that give less weight to their testimony; however, Shari'a courts usually accord less weight to the testimony of women and non-Muslims.

There is a legal distinction between "indigenes," persons whose ethnic group is considered native to a location, and "settlers," persons who have ethnic roots in another part of the country, even though their ethnic group may have lived in a new location for several generations. Throughout the country, authorities grant indigenes certain privileges, including political positions, access to government employment, and lower school fees. To receive such privileges, a person must produce a certificate of indigeneship, granted by local government authorities. The concept of indigeneship is regularly exploited to discriminate against minority ethnic and religious groups, according to Human Rights Watch.

Several northern states used state funds for the construction of mosques, the training of Qadis, and subsidies for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Several other states, including northern states, apportioned funds to finance Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to construct churches. State governments generally

made efforts to meet the religious needs expressed by the majority of their residents.

In April 2008 the National Hajj Commission announced it would not provide federal subsidies for pilgrimages to Mecca, and over the past few years there has been a gradual decrease in the amount of government-provided support; however, the subsidies have not been completely phased out. The commission is responsible for logistical arrangements for the country's 75,000 annual pilgrims.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), co-chaired by Christian Association of Nigeria President Archbishop John Onaiyekan and Jama'atul Nasril Islam President Sultan Muhammadu Abubakar, advises the Government on ways to mitigate violence among religious communities. NIREC, which is funded by the Federal Government, meets quarterly, rotating its meetings throughout the country.

The law requires Christian and Muslim groups planning to build new churches or mosques to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). In Bauchi and Kano states, state-level authorities reportedly denied building permits for new construction of Christian churches and for expansion and renovation of existing churches. Churches at times have applied for residential permits as an alternative. Officials closed or demolished churches and mosques that ignored registration requirements or violated other zoning laws.

Both federal and state governments were involved in the regulation of mandatory religious instruction in public schools; however, as mandated by the Constitution (Section 38.2), students do not receive religious instruction in any religion other than their own. State officials claimed that students could request a teacher of their own religious beliefs to provide alternative instruction. Nonetheless, there were often no teachers capable of teaching Christianity in northern schools or of teaching Islam in southern schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although local political actors stoked sectarian violence with impunity.

Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states continued to allege that local government officials used zoning regulations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches and in some cases reportedly demolished churches that had existed for up to a decade. Muslims in the predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna State alleged that local government officials prevented the construction of mosques and Islamic schools. In the past, officials have denied discrimination, attributing application denials to zoning regulations in residential neighborhoods and the large backlog of applications.

Although the expanded jurisdiction of Shari'a technically does not apply to non-Muslims in civil and criminal proceedings, certain social mores inspired by Shari'a, such as the separation of the sexes in public schools, health care, and transportation services, have affected non-Muslim minorities in the north.

Hisbah--private vigilante Shari'a enforcement groups funded by state governments in Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, and Kano states--enforced some Shari'a statutes in their respective states. In Kano, Hisbah leaders cited prohibitions of alcohol and prostitution as the group's primary focus; however, overall they continued to serve primarily as traffic wardens and marketplace regulators.

In April 2009 the director-general of the Kano Hisbah Board threatened to enter a predominantly non-Muslim area of Kano city to confiscate alcohol and crack down on prostitution if hoteliers did not comply with an agreement to clean up "beer spots and brothels." Kano State maintains steep fines and prison sentences for the public consumption and distribution of alcohol, in compliance with its Shari'a statutes.

On March 28, 2009, the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital fired a nurse for wearing an elbow-length hijab. The hospital, owned by the federal Government, issued a statement that it terminated the nurse's employment for violating the hospital's dress code (which allows for a shorter, shoulder-length hijab) and not for religious reasons.

In January 2009 the Kano Hisbah Board reportedly ordered the Association of Divorcées, Widows, and Orphans to refrain from staging a rally in Kano city, calling the rally un-Islamic. The intent of the rally was to publicize legislation that would improve the lives of divorcées. Hisbah leadership claims it barred the rally as a precaution to prevent further conflicts following the November 2008 violence in Jos. The director-general said the board had made accommodations for the

Association of Divorcées, Widows, and Orphans to host radio programs instead. According to Kano State law, the Hisbah have the authority to arrest individuals for violating Shari'a law, although they cannot prosecute them.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

State officials and police in Sokoto State allegedly continued to engage in a coordinated campaign of persecution of Shi'a Muslims that reportedly began in 2007, detaining large numbers of Shi'a and their religious leaders.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that Shi'ite homes and businesses were demolished, with little or no subsequent official investigation into the incidents. There were reports that government officials fired persons identified as Shi'a from state jobs; others quit under fear that their superiors would label them as Shi'a. Many Shi'a reportedly fled to neighboring states in response to the persecution.

There were continuing delays in the trial of 18 men who were arrested in August 2007 in Bauchi and who faced vagrancy and cross-dressing charges under the Bauchi State Shari'a Penal Code. The defendants remained free pending the outcome of the trial.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were some reports of Christians forced to convert to Islam; however, these reports could not be confirmed. There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

In many communities, Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced ostracism by members of their former religion. In some northern states, those wishing to convert to Islam applied to the Shari'a Council for a letter of conversion to be sent to their families (thereby dissolving marriages to Christians) and to request Hisbah protection from reprisals by relatives.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Violence between Christian and Muslim communities increased, as political and socioeconomic conflicts often divided persons along religious lines and were expressed in the targeting of religious symbols and spaces. Acute sectarian violence in the Middle Belt served to heighten tensions between religious groups even in parts of the country that did not experience the violence.

Religious differences often paralleled and exacerbated differences between ethnic groups. Competition for scarce resources, in concert with livelihood differences and discriminatory employment practices, often underlay violence between different ethnoreligious communities. Local politicians and others continued to occasionally use religion as a catalyst for fomenting hostility between groups.

While the law prohibits religious discrimination in employment and other practices, some private businesses continued to discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnicity in their hiring practices. In nearly all states, rivalries between "indigenes" and "settlers" led to some societal discrimination against minority ethnic and religious groups.

On June 17, 2009, there were clashes between Christians and Muslims north of Suleja, Niger State, after police released a man accused of stealing a cell phone from a Muslim man in the village of Gauraka. A local pastor reportedly spoke provocatively about the Muslim man who had reported the theft to police. Muslims responded by attacking Christians, resulting in the pastor's death. Authorities responded to the spreading violence by closing schools and increasing security in the area.

On April 20, 2009, unverified reports claimed that Muslim rioters in Kano attacked Christians and burned cars in response to a Christian who allegedly wrote on a shop wall mocking the Prophet Muhammad.

On April 13, 2009, Muslims in Gwada, Niger State, reportedly burned down three churches, damaged property, and injured at least 20 Christians during an Easter procession. Press reports said riot police arrested 88 suspects. The violence spread to Minna, where Muslim youths allegedly injured five Christian youths, damaged several vehicles, and attempted to burn down the First Baptist Church. Police arrested approximately 20 suspects.

On February 20, 2009, a conflict over parking at a church in Bauchi before weekly Juma'at prayers at a nearby mosque sparked violence between Christians and Muslims. The violence, perpetrated principally by Hausa-Fulani "Sara Suka"

groups (a Hausa term meaning those who slash and cut, referring to violent gangs of young men), resulted in at least 11 deaths, 100 persons injured, and 4,500 persons displaced. Rioters burned at least 200 properties, six churches, three mosques, and numerous vehicles; the Red Cross estimated that 85 percent of the damage was to Christian homes and businesses. The state government imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew as military troops regained control of the city. Although police arrested several "Sara Suka" men following the violence, there were reports that virtually all were released at the behest of local politicians who occasionally employ them.

On January 6, 2009, Shi'a Muslim youth reportedly loyal to Sheikh Ibrahim El-zakzaky threw stones at the Emir of Zauzau's vehicle in Zaria, Kaduna State. Despite the Emir's immediate calls for his Sunni supporters to refrain from violence, Sunni Muslims in retaliation reportedly killed five persons, injured between 30 and 100 persons, and vandalized or burned houses presumed to belong to other Shi'a.

On November 27, 2008, ethnoreligious violence erupted in Jos following the Local Government Area (LGA) elections in Plateau State, with mob attacks continuing for three days. At least 300 persons were killed, and some estimate that as many as 2,000 persons died in the violence. Hundreds of others were injured. It was widely reported that rioters razed churches, mosques, and numerous businesses and vehicles. The crisis displaced at least 10,000 persons, although most returned home within two weeks. The state governor implemented a curfew and directed security agents enforcing it to "shoot on sight," resulting in many of the fatalities. The curfew remained in effect at the end of the reporting period. Police arrested at least 500 persons, although no trials had commenced by the end of the reporting period.

The political divides in Plateau State fall along ethnic and religious lines; the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) is supported primarily by Christian tribes while the opposition All Nigeria People's Party is supported primarily by Hausa-Fulani Muslims. Christian tribes are generally considered "indigene" and receive accordant political and economic privileges, while Hausi-Fulani are considered "settlers," despite the large numbers who descend from Hausas who moved to the area in the early 20th century. Although the residents of Jos North LGA are predominately Muslim Hausa-Fulani, the Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission announced that the PDP won the November 27, 2008 elections in all of the 17 LGAs in the state. While it remained unclear who initiated the violence, in the past local elites were instrumental in exploiting tensions between the Muslim

Hausa-Fulani in Jos North and surrounding Christian ethnic groups for political purposes.

On December 26, 2008, President Umaru Yar'Adua established an Administrative Panel of Inquiry to investigate the Jos violence. The governor filed an injunction with the Supreme Court to stop the federal investigation and established Plateau State's own Judicial Commission of Inquiry. In addition the House of Representatives formed an investigative committee. By the end of the reporting period, the House of Representatives' committee had submitted a report to the House, but neither of the other panels had reached a conclusion. The House attributed the violence to the Plateau State Government, political parties, the Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission, and religious leaders. Similar commissions established after violence in 2001 and 2004 failed to lead to prosecutions.

On August 31, 2008, Muslims reportedly burned Christ Apostolic Church in Ilorin, Kwara State, in protest over the church's location 500 yards from a mosque. The church's pastor reported that the arson followed June 2008 vandalism of the church's sanctuary. In September the chief of police said the incident was under investigation.

On August 14, 2008, Muslims in Ilorin, Kwara State, allegedly killed at least three Christians and attacked others because they believed Christian prayers caused the death of a local Muslim leader. In September the chief of police said that the incident was under investigation.

NGOs and traditional leaders throughout the country led conflict resolution efforts to reduce sectarian violence in their communities; however, these efforts lacked the scale, influence, or political support required to deter further violence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Mission promoted religious pluralism at the three iftars it hosted (in Kano, Kaduna, and Abuja) during Ramadan.

The U.S. Government placed a full-time advisor at the Interfaith Mediation Center in Kaduna who implemented a capacity-building program to address ethnic and religious violence.

The U.S. Conflict Abatement through Local Mediation program operated in five states (Delta, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, and Rivers). The program promoted local conflict mitigation by educating community and opinion leaders, youth groups, and faith-based organizations about the benefits of peaceful coexistence. Through the program, the U.S. Mission also provided support to the Interfaith Mediation Center (IMC) and three Conflict Mitigation and Management Regional Councils (CMMRCs), made up of 37 Muslim and 30 Christian clerics in Kano, Kaduna, and Plateau states. The Mission provided training and technical assistance to IMC to enhance its capacity to develop and implement ethnic and interfaith activities. The Mission trained the CMMRCs to collect and disseminate early warning information and to respond directly and quickly to threats to peace, including ethnic and religious tensions.

The U.S. Mission regularly distributed information throughout the country on human rights topics, including religious freedom, to journalists, academics, business persons, civic organizations, teachers, students, government officials, the military, clergy, and traditional rulers through Information Resource Centers and American Corners.

The United States regularly sponsored speakers on the rule of law, religious tolerance, and democratic governance at major universities, think tanks, and American Corners in major cities.

NORWAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, the state church, enjoys some benefits not available to other religious groups.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 150,000 square miles and a population of 4.75 million. Citizens are considered to be members of the state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, unless they explicitly state otherwise. For example, citizens may elect to associate themselves with another denomination, nonreligious organization (e.g., the Norwegian Humanist Association), or to have no religious affiliation at all. An estimated 82 percent of the population (3.9 million persons) nominally belongs to the state church. However, actual church attendance is quite low.

Other religious groups operate freely and include various Protestant Christian denominations (166,000 registered members), Muslims (84,000), Roman Catholics (54,000), and Jews (850). Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus are also present in small numbers, together constituting less than 1 percent of the population. The Norwegian Humanist Association--the largest national organization for those who do not formally practice any religion, including atheists--has 79,870 registered members. An unknown number of persons belong to religious institutions but do not formally register with the Government, so they are not reflected in the statistics.

The majority of European and American immigrants, who make up approximately 45 percent of the foreign-born population, are either Christian or nonreligious, with the exception of Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Most non-Western immigrants practice Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, or Hinduism. Of religious minority members, 55 percent are concentrated in the Oslo metropolitan area, including 57 percent of Muslims and most of the Buddhist community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway is the state church. The state supports it financially, and there is a constitutional requirement that the King and at least one-half of the cabinet belong to this church.

In 2008 there was a public debate about introducing greater separation in the state-church relationship. In April 2008 the Minister of Culture presented the results of a parliament-commissioned report on the state and church relationship that had been five years in the making and had included significant public input. The report called for maintaining the state church but for further democratization of the Church and for the Government to consider changes to the Constitution that would further separate church and state functions. One of the immediate effects was the signing of a church agreement that gives the state church the ability to select, but not appoint, its own bishops, a role that had previously been fulfilled by the Government. The legal power to officially appoint bishops will not be transferred to the Church until Parliament amends the Constitution on this point, which it was expected to do during the 2009-11 session.

The Government observes the following religious holidays, all of which are Christian, as national holidays: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Whit-Monday, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day.

A religious community must register with the Government only if it desires state financial support, which is provided to all registered denominations in proportion to their formally registered membership. Some faith groups argued that this registration requirement disadvantages their efforts to get funding, since the faiths

most popular among immigrants generally, including Islam and Roman Catholicism, are also most popular among individuals who are in the country either illegally or as political refugees, and who may be leery of contact with state officials.

In February 2009 the Police Directorate, responding to a petition by a Muslim woman, proposed that the hijab be permitted to be worn with the police uniform in order to recruit a broader field of candidates for police work. This proposal caused an intense nationwide political and media debate, and the police union came out firmly against the change. Some commentators argued that all policewomen should dress the same, and citizens might be afraid that they would not receive equal treatment from a policewoman wearing a hijab. Two weeks after it initially expressed its support for the Police Directorate's proposal, the Justice Ministry withdrew its support and ruled against allowing the hijab to be worn. Many in the Muslim community were disappointed by the Government's reversal.

In February 2006 the city of Oslo submitted a plan to ban the wearing of burqas and nikabs to the Education Directorate for evaluation. The Education Directorate subsequently submitted the plan to the Ministry of Education, concerned that the ban might contravene the Norwegian Constitution. In August 2006, while still awaiting an advisory opinion, the city of Oslo implemented the ban. The Ministry of Education submitted the issue to the Ministry of Justice, which in September 2007 determined that a ban on burqas and nikabs was not inconsistent with Norwegian law and international conventions. However, there were no reports of the ban being enforced by the end of the reporting period.

Norway is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and assumed the rotating chairmanship of the organization in 2009. In 2003 the Government instituted annual observance of Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27 in schools nationwide, as part of a National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination. In addition, high school curriculums include the deportation and extermination of Jewish citizens from 1942 to 1945. The Government also continued to support the foundation "The White Buses," which takes Norwegian secondary school students to Auschwitz, Poland, to educate them about the Holocaust. In August 2007, following a multiyear, \$10 million (NOK 60 million) construction project, Norway opened the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in the wartime residence of Nazi collaborator Vikdun Quisling. The associated museum features a history of the Holocaust in the country. During the reporting period, the

Center supported Holocaust-related research and sponsored seminars related to the Jewish experience during the Nazi occupation period.

A 1997 law introduced the Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) course for grades 1 through 10 (generally ages six to 16). The CKREE reviews world religions and philosophy while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs. Citing the country's Christian history (and the stated importance of Christianity to society), the CKREE devotes an extensive amount of time to studying Christianity. This class is mandatory, without any exceptions for children of other religious groups. On special grounds, students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts, such as church services or prayer.

Organizations for atheists, as well as Muslim communities, contested the legality of mandatory religious education, claiming that it was a breach of freedom of religion and parents' right to provide religious instruction to their children. After the case was heard before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2002 and again in 2006, the Government modified the curriculum and expanded the education to more thoroughly discuss other religions while continuing an emphasis on Christianity as the religion of the majority of citizens.

There are no special licensing or registration requirements for foreign religious workers. Such workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

After an intense political and media debate in January 2009, and particularly due to widespread criticism that it would infringe on free speech, the Government withdrew from consideration a proposed modification of the penal law that would have criminalized "proven attacks on religion or philosophy." Although proposed by a centrist Christian party, the public debate on the law made reference to the Danish and Norwegian "cartoon controversies" of the past few years, and the proposed law was cited by one political party as evidence of caving in to "stealth Islamification."

In December 2008 Muslim inmates in a Trondheim prison complained that the prison served food that contained pork. Prison authorities said the incident was the result of a mistake. More than one-third of prison inmates are Muslims, but none of the facilities offer halal food. One Muslim politician suggested that prisons serve halal food as a default, with prisoners able to request nonhalal food on the side; however, the Government did not act upon the suggestion.

In May 2008 two Christian pastors, one American and one Norwegian, were arrested for sharing their faith with signs and public preaching near a parade route during the country's independence celebration. In November 2008 and January 2009, the American pastor lost appeals, which he based on a free speech defense, of his trial court sentence before the appellate and supreme courts, respectively. The trial court had ruled that the pastors' right to free speech could not exceed the police's power to ensure order. A suit by the Norwegian pastor based on similar events that occurred in 2007 was on file at the ECHR, which was scheduled to decide in October 2009 whether to hear the case. The American pastor also intended to file a case with the ECHR, based on the May 2008 events, by July 2009.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits employers to ask job applicants who are applying for positions in religious or other private schools, or day care centers, whether they agree to teach and behave in accordance with the institution's or religion's beliefs and principles.

The Government did not enforce a ban on the wearing of burqas and nikabs in schools, permitting every school to independently determine whether to implement such a ban; during the reporting period, there were no reports that any school enforced a ban.

A ban remained in place on policewomen wearing the hijab with police uniforms, despite the Government having earlier briefly supported a proposal to allow wearing of it.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, Islam and so-called Islamification in the country were subjects of increasing debate among politicians, the media, and civic and religious groups. In February 2009 the second-largest political party, the Progress Party, published a list of events over the last decade that it purported showed that the country was being "Islamified by stealth." Measured by opinion polls, the Progress Party's popularity increased after it published its list. The list was heavily criticized by other political parties and prominent commentators, but the notion that Islam was insidiously threatening the country's society and culture provided a background to several substantive issues. Covered in Section II, these included debates over the use of the hijab by policewomen, halal food in prisons, and the proposed law that would have banned "attacks on religion."

Anecdotal press reports during the reporting period indicated that job seekers with first or last names that appear to be Muslim were much less likely to receive responses to their applications for employment.

During the reporting period, and especially during Israel's operations in Gaza in late December 2008, anti-Semitism, and a corresponding debate about it, significantly increased in intensity. During the Gaza events, violent anti-Israel riots broke out on several occasions in Oslo. A pro-Israel march in Bergen was cancelled when the police stated that it could not guarantee participants' safety. The location of the line between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitism was frequently discussed. The general atmosphere for Jews in the country, however, worsened to the point where Foreign Minister Stoere visited a synagogue on January 18, 2009 to show solidarity with Jewish citizens who "feel alienated" and are "experiencing growing anti-Semitism."

During January 2009 both a former prime minister and a high-profile commentator on U.S. policy were accused of making anti-Semitic comments. Their statements were criticized as blurring the line between Jewishness and Israeli government policy.

In mid-January 2009 a first secretary at the Norwegian embassy in Saudi Arabia used a government e-mail system to send out a chain e-mail with images comparing Israeli soldiers to Nazi soldiers. Some politicians urged the Government to fire the employee; there was no further information on the case by the end of the reporting period.

The small Jewish community in the country was frightened by the rise in anti-Semitism during the Gaza war. A leading newspaper reported that it had difficulty finding Jews who were willing to be publicly interviewed, as they felt they might be targeted. The chief rabbi of the Oslo Synagogue received daily piles of hate mail full of anti-Semitic vitriol.

On May 29, 2009, a fire destroyed a 204-year-old Lutheran church in Vaaler, Hedmark Province; police concluded that the fire was an act of arson.

On May 17, 2009, 10 graves were vandalized at a Lutheran church in the town of As, Akershus Province.

On May 14, 2009, the cemetery of the Mosaic Religious Community in Oslo (the Jewish community), established in 1869, was vandalized. Several gravestones were defaced with Nazi symbols; on one, "the war is not over" was written.

On May 1, 2009, vandals knocked over 35 gravestones near the Lutheran Nordstrand church in Oslo. Additionally, the vandals destroyed flowers, broke windows, and wrote "Satan Lives" on the door of the church.

The press heavily criticized a controversial television comedian for telling a joke that trivialized the killing of Jews during the Holocaust. A nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported the incident to the police, but the comedian was not charged with any wrongdoing.

There were no other reported societal abuses or cases of discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period.

The Council for Religious and Philosophical Communities includes the state church and other religious communities, among them the Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities, as well as secular humanist groups. The Council, acting as an umbrella organization, organized many events that furthered interreligious dialogue and debate, including a 2008 "dialogue conference" that was expected to be repeated in 2009, and a debate about religion in educational institutions.

The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated closer coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom issues both domestically and outside of the country. The Coalition was conducting research projects on New Directions in Islamic Thought and Practice, Facilitating Freedom of Religion,

Missionary Activities and Human Rights, and Teaching for Tolerance and Religious Freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly sponsored speakers and other events to highlight religious freedom. During the reporting period, the Ambassador hosted both an interreligious Thanksgiving dinner and, in January, a human rights NGO reception during which the importance of religious freedom, both in the country and around the world, was discussed. In May 2009 the Embassy also invited Imam Yahya Hendi, a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, to speak to the Islamic Council, Muslim youth groups, and the Theological Faculty of the University of Oslo about religious freedom in the United States.

THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (INCLUDING AREAS SUBJECT TO THE JURISDICTION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY)

The Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have a Constitution but has stated that the Palestinian Basic Law functions as its temporary constitution. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation, but provides for freedom of belief, worship and the performance of religious rites, unless they violate public order or morality. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law and that basic human rights and liberties shall be protected.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israel has no Constitution, and while its Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty does not specifically refer to freedom of religion, it does refer to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which explicitly provides for the protection of religious freedom. In addition, numerous Supreme Court rulings incorporate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including their religious freedom provisions, into the country's body of law.

The Israeli Government generally respected the right to freedom of religion in the Occupied Territories during the reporting period. However, despite provisions for freedom of religion in the PA's Basic Law and the Israeli Government's Declaration of Independence, religious freedom restrictions continued in the Occupied Territories. In particular, Israel's strict closure policies and the separation barrier constructed by the Government of Israel had the effect of severely restricting the ability of Palestinian Muslims and Christians to reach places of worship and to practice their religious rites. Israeli law also restricted the ability of Israeli Jews to reach places of worship in areas under Palestinian control.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the PA was unchanged during the reporting period. PA government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although problems persisted during the reporting period. The Gaza Strip remained under the control of Hamas during the reporting period, and the PA was therefore unable to enforce respect for religious freedom or address reports of harassment of religious groups in the Gaza Strip.

Christians and Muslims generally enjoyed good relations, although tensions existed. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews remained high during the reporting period, and continuing violence heightened those tensions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Palestinian Authority as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Government efforts to promote religious freedom focused on some specific instances of crime and attacks targeting particular religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) has an area of 2,238 square miles and a population of 2.4 million persons, not including approximately 300,000 Israelis. East Jerusalem has an area of 27 square miles, and its population is 415,000, including approximately 180,000 Israelis. The Gaza Strip has an area of 143 square miles and a population of 1.5 million.

Approximately 98 percent of Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories are Sunni Muslims. While estimates vary in the absence of reliable census data, there are about 120,000 Christians in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and an estimated 1,500 to 2,500 Christians in the Gaza Strip. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; the remainder consists of Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Maronites, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated primarily in the areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem, but smaller communities exist elsewhere. According to local Christian leaders, Palestinian Christian emigration has accelerated since 2001, reducing the number of Christians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Most left for security and economic reasons, often related to the effects of the barrier; however, low birth rates among Palestinian Christians also contribute to their shrinking numbers. There is also a community of approximately 400 Samaritans located on Mount Gerazim near Nablus in the West Bank.

A very small number of adherents of several denominations of evangelical Christians, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, reside in the West Bank.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have a Constitution but has stated that the Palestinian Basic Law functions as its temporary constitution. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation, but provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the performance of religious rites, unless they violate public order or morality. The Basic Law also proscribes discrimination based on religion and stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law and that basic human rights and liberties shall be protected. The PA sought to protect religious freedom in full and did not tolerate its abuse by either governmental or private actors.

The construction of a separation barrier by the Government of Israel, begun in 2002 due to stated security concerns, has severely limited access to holy sites and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, healthcare, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. The barrier also impedes the work of non-religious organizations, and at times the Israeli Government makes efforts to lessen the impact on religious communities. Closures and long waits at Israeli border crossings often impede travel for religious purposes.

In implementing construction of the barrier, the Government of Israel has confiscated property owned by Palestinians and several religious institutions, displaced Christian and Muslim residents, and tightened restrictions on movement for non-Jewish communities. Most Palestinians and religious institutions have refused compensation to avoid any perception that accepting compensation would legalize the confiscation of land and building of the barrier. According to the Israeli Government, it sought to build the barrier on public lands where possible, and when private land was used, provided opportunities for compensation. In principle, compensation was offered automatically with every confiscation order related to the barrier; however, owners needed to go through an appeals process. The value of the compensation was not automatic and was subject to appraisal and verification.

Churches in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza operate under one of three general categories: churches recognized by the status quo agreements reached under Ottoman rule in the late 19th century; Protestant, including evangelical, churches established between the late 19th century and 1967, which, although they exist and operate, are not recognized officially by the PA; and a small number of churches that have become active within the last decade and whose legal status is less certain.

The first group of churches is governed by nineteenth century status quo agreements reached with Ottoman authorities, which the PA respects. These agreements specifically established the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Coptic, and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. The Episcopal and Lutheran Churches were added later to this list. The PA, immediately upon its establishment, recognized these churches and their rights. Like Shari'a courts under Islam, these religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status and some property matters for members of their religious communities. Civil courts do not adjudicate such matters.

Churches in the second category, which includes the Assemblies of God, Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches, have unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements. They are permitted to operate freely and are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The third category consists of a small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These churches also generally operate unhindered by the PA.

The PA requires Palestinians to declare their religious affiliation on identification papers and strongly enforces this requirement. Either Islamic or Christian religious courts must handle all legal matters relating to personal status, if such courts exist for the individual's denomination. In general all matters related to personal status--including inheritance, marriage, dowry, divorce, and child support--are handled by such courts, which exist for Muslims and Christians.

All legally recognized individual sects are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and most do so. The PA does not have a civil marriage law. Legally, members of one religious group mutually may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different denomination to adjudicate, but this is not known to occur. Churches that are not officially recognized by the PA must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters; many non-recognized churches advise their members to marry (or divorce) abroad.

Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. A 1995 PA

presidential decree stipulated that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA would continue in force until the PA enacted new laws or amended the old ones. Therefore, in the West Bank, which was formerly under Jordanian rule, the Shari'a-based Jordanian Status Law of 1976 governs Muslim women's status (among other matters). Under that law, which includes inheritance and marriage laws, women inherit less than male members of the family. The marriage law allows men to take more than one wife, although few do so. Prior to marriage, a woman and man may stipulate terms in the marriage contract that govern financial and child custody matters in the event of divorce. Reportedly, few women use this section of the law.

Muslim women generally are discouraged from including divorce arrangements in a marriage contract as a result of societal pressure. The PA personal status law states that custody of children below the age of 18 is given to the mother. Child support and "divorce benefits" are also guaranteed by law. It is also customary that a sizable sum of a deferred dowry is documented in the marriage contract. Personal status law for Muslims in Gaza is based on an Egyptian interpretation of Shari'a, which stipulates similar restrictions on women.

Islam is the official religion of the PA and Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential treatment. The PA has a Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs that pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques and the salaries of most Palestinian imams. The Ministry also provides limited financial support to some Christian clergymen and Christian charitable organizations. The PA does not provide financial support to any Jewish institutions or holy sites in the West Bank; Jewish sites are generally under Israeli government control.

In East Jerusalem, the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) contains the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, among the holiest sites in Islam. Jews refer to the same place as the Temple Mount and consider it the location of the ancient Jewish temple. The location has been, as with all of East Jerusalem, under Israeli control since 1967, when Israel captured the city (East Jerusalem was formally annexed in 1980, and thus Israel applies its laws to East Jerusalem). The Haram al-Sharif--and all other Waqf institutions in Jerusalem--are administered, however, by the Jerusalem Waqf, a Jordanian-funded and administered Islamic trust and charitable organization with ties to the PA.

The Government of Israel, as a matter of stated policy, opposes non-Muslim worship at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount since 1967. Israeli police generally

do not permit public prayer by non-Muslims and publicly indicated that this policy remains operative even though non-Muslims visit the compound.

Since early 2001, following the outbreak of the Intifada, the Israeli Government has prohibited Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA. This restriction prevents Israeli Arabs from visiting Muslim and Christian holy sites in the West Bank, and Jewish Israelis from visiting other sites, including an ancient synagogue in Jericho. Visits to the Jericho synagogue are severely curtailed as a result of disagreements between Israel and the PA over security arrangements.

The PA requires the teaching of religion in PA schools with separate courses for Muslim and Christian students. A compulsory curriculum requires the study of Christianity for Christian students and Islam for Muslim students in grades one through six. In 2006 the PA Ministry of Education and Higher Education completed its revision of primary and secondary school textbooks, begun in 1999. The U.S. government-funded review of Palestinian textbooks undertaken by the Israeli-Palestinian Center for Research and Information concluded that the textbooks did not cross the line into incitement but continued to show elements of imbalance, bias, and inaccuracy. Critics noted, however, that the new textbooks often ignored historical Jewish connections to Israel and Jerusalem.

PA President Abbas has informal advisors on Christian affairs. Six seats in the 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council are reserved for Christians; there are no seats reserved for members of any other faith. The following holy days are considered national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, and Christmas. The Palestinian Authority maintains a Friday/Saturday weekend, but Christians are allowed to take Sunday off instead of Saturday. Christians take Easter as a fully paid religious holiday.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

PA government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although problems persisted during the reporting period.

The PA did not take sufficient action during the reporting period to investigate and bring to justice persons who harassed, intimidated, and perpetrated attacks against some Christian residents of Bethlehem and Ramallah as described in previous International Religious Freedom reports. The PA judiciary also failed to

adjudicate numerous cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs.

The Government of Israel continued to apply travel restrictions during the reporting period that significantly impeded freedom of access to places of worship in the West Bank for Muslims and Christians. Citing violence and security concerns, the Israeli Government has imposed a broad range of strict closures and curfews throughout the Occupied Territories since October 2000.

During the reporting period the Government of Israel severely restricted the access of most Muslims from the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem to the Haram al-Sharif. The Israeli Government prevented Palestinian Muslims from the West Bank and Gaza from reaching it and other religious sites by prohibiting their entry into Jerusalem. Israeli authorities also generally restricted access for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, especially males under the age of 50, and sometimes women under the age of 45. During Ramadan (September 2 to October 1, 2008) they refused men under the age of 45 access to the site, citing security concerns.

There were also disputes between the Muslim administrators of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Israeli authorities over Israeli restrictions on Waqf attempts to carry out repairs and physical improvements on the compound and its mosques. The approval process for a permanent ramp leading to the Mughrabi Gate of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount continued during the reporting period. However, excavations in the immediate vicinity of the Mughrabi Gate did not proceed.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities continued to limit visas for Arab Christian clergy serving in the West Bank or Jerusalem to single-entry visas, complicating clergy's travel outside of the area. This disrupted their work and caused financial difficulties to their sponsoring religious organizations. Catholic and Orthodox priests, nuns, and other religious workers, often from Syria and Lebanon, faced long delays and sometimes were denied applications. The Israeli Government indicated that delays or denials were due to security processing for visas and extensions. The shortage of foreign clergy impeded the functioning of Christian congregations.

During the reporting period, the Israeli Government continued to construct a separation barrier in and around East Jerusalem, which had the effect of inhibiting the ability of Palestinians and some Israelis to practice their religion and seriously

restricting access by West Bank Muslims and Christians to holy sites in Jerusalem and in the West Bank.

The separation barrier made it particularly difficult for Bethlehem-area Christians to reach the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and made visits to Christian sites in Bethany and Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the Jerusalem side of the barrier, further fragmenting and dividing this small minority community. Foreign pilgrims and religious aid workers occasionally experienced difficulty obtaining access to Christian holy sites in the West Bank because of the barrier and Israeli restrictions on movement in the West Bank. The barrier and checkpoints also impeded the movement of clergy between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries, as well as the movement of congregations between their homes and places of worship.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities severely limited the access of Palestinians to Rachel's tomb, a shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but allowed relatively unimpeded access to Jewish visitors. However, in August, 2008, a group of Jewish activists protested that they were restricted from accessing the compound.

Israeli closure policy during the reporting period prevented tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching places of worship in Jerusalem and the West Bank, including during religious holidays such as Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter. Church leaders publicly criticized the Government of Israel's security measures during religious events, such as the Holy Fire, the day before Orthodox Easter, and the Pope's pilgrimage. While the Israeli Government made special arrangements to ease travel restrictions for both Christians and Muslims during religious holidays and Pope Benedict XVI's visit, there were many complaints that the number of permits and freedom of movement remained inadequate. Muslim and Christian clergy again reported problems reaching their congregations and accessing religious sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

During the reporting period, the press reported that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Central Command canceled a number of scheduled visits by Israelis to Jewish holy sites in the Occupied Territories, such as Joseph's Tomb, due to stated security concerns. The press also reported a rise in the number of Jews visiting the site without Israeli government authorization.

During Jewish holidays, which included days during the reporting period, the IDF closed to Muslims the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the

second most important mosque in the Occupied Territories. The IDF reopened the site for Muslim worship during times other than during Jewish holidays, including Passover (seven days), Yom Kippur (one day), and other high holidays. The Jewish side of the site is closed for four Muslim holidays.

Israeli police in November 2008 confiscated loudspeakers from a mosque in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sur Bahir because of complaints from Jewish neighbors in the settlement of Har Homa that the Muslim call to prayer constituted noise pollution. Settlers in Givat Zeev also attempted legally to prevent the Muslim call to prayer from sounding in the nearby village of al-Jib.

While there were no specific restrictions placed on Palestinians making the Hajj, all Palestinian religious groups faced restrictions in practice, such as closures and long waits at Israeli border crossings, which often impeded travel for religious purposes.

Waqf officials complained that Israeli police did not respect agreements regarding control of the Haram al-Sharif site. The Israeli police have exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance to the compound. Waqf officials control the other entrances; however, Israeli police can limit access from all entrances. In general, police allowed non-Muslim visitors to enter the compound at the Mughrabi Gate during set visiting hours. The Waqf can object to the presence of particular persons, such as non-Muslim religious groups, or to prohibited activities, such as prayer by non-Muslims or disrespectful clothing or behavior, but it lacks effective authority to remove anyone from the site. The press reported that police sometimes allowed religious extremists (such as Jews seeking to remove the mosques and to rebuild the ancient temple on the site) and immodestly dressed persons to enter and sometimes were not responsive to enforcing the site's rules.

During Jewish holidays--particularly around Yom Kippur (October 9, 2008) and Passover (April 9-15, 2009)--the press reported that Israeli police escorted Jewish activists onto the Noble Sanctuary/Temple Mount compound and allowed them to perform prayers. The Press quoted a Jewish spokesman criticizing the Government of Israel for limiting their access to the compound. During Passover, Waqf officials contended that Israeli police allowed members of Jewish groups to enter the Haram al-Sharif and worship. Waqf officials viewed these actions as an attempt by the Israeli police to exert more control over the site. However, unlike in previous reporting periods, these actions did not cause violent clashes between Israeli police and Muslims on the site.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Many of the national and municipal policies in Jerusalem were designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem. According to Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, the Israeli Government used a combination of zoning restrictions on building by Palestinians, confiscation of Palestinian lands, and demolition of Palestinian homes to "contain" non-Jewish neighborhoods while simultaneously permitting Jewish settlement in predominantly Palestinian areas in East Jerusalem.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the Occupied Territories.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Terrorists did not systematically attack anyone in the Occupied Territories for religious reasons. Hamas authorities often failed to effectively investigate or prosecute religiously driven crimes committed by Muslim extremist vigilante groups in Gaza.

Due to the Hamas take-over of the Gaza Strip, the PA was unable to pursue cases of religious discrimination there. Some Gazan Christians stated that they believed their Muslim neighbors were discriminating against them for their faith; they also raised concerns that no authority was willing or able to reign in extremist groups. Hamas did not adequately address the cases of discrimination against or intimidation of Christians that occurred during the previous reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In May 2009, when Palestinian Muslims from Jalazone Refugee Camp vandalized two Christian cemeteries, PA security forces arrested the perpetrators, and PA officials publicly condemned the attack.

The PA did not officially sponsor interfaith dialogue during the reporting period; however, it sent representatives to meetings on improving interreligious relations and attempts to foster goodwill among religious leaders. Throughout the reporting period, the PA issued directives restricting the content of sermons to religious topics and worked to prevent radical imams from preaching sermons in mosques in the West Bank that incite violence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the Occupied Territories at times imbued the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, primarily between Christians and Muslims during the reporting period. Relations between Jews and non-Jews often were strained as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well as Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Relations among Jews living in Jerusalem and the West Bank were strained based on different interpretations of Judaism, and some non-Orthodox Jews experienced discrimination on the part of some ultra-Orthodox (sometimes referred to as "Haredi") Jews.

Societal attitudes continued to be a barrier to conversions, especially for Muslims converting to Christianity; however, conversion is not illegal in the Occupied Territories. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

Tension between Muslim and Christian families sometimes led to religious harassment. In May 2009 Palestinian Muslims from Jalazone Refugee Camp vandalized two Christian cemeteries based on a family dispute.

Interfaith romance was a sensitive issue during the reporting period. Most Christian and Muslim families in the Occupied Territories encouraged their children--especially their daughters--to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm encountered considerable societal and familial opposition.

A group of Jewish extremists vandalized a Muslim cemetery near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on May 22, 2009. The same day, a Jewish group carrying Israeli flags and wearing shirts depicting the Jewish temple attempted to forcibly enter the site. According to credible reports, the same group vandalized some

Palestinian-owned shops in the Old City after Israeli police turned them away from the compound. Christian leaders complained throughout the reporting period that Jewish groups vandalized Christian buildings on Mount Zion, and said Israeli police did not take steps to prevent the crimes or identify the vandals.

Jewish settler violence against Palestinians prevented some Palestinians from reaching holy sites in the Occupied Territories. Settlers in Hebron forcibly prevented Muslim muezzins from reaching the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to sound the call to prayer and harassed Muslim worshippers in Hebron.

In August 2008 a group of approximately 50 armed settlers forcibly entered the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron before IDF forces were able to remove them. Muslim officials denounced Jewish efforts to expand and renovate areas of the mosque under Jewish control. Jewish worshippers at the site claimed that Muslims vandalized Jewish items during Muslim holidays.

Israeli settler radio stations often depicted Arabs as subhuman and called for Palestinians to be expelled from the West Bank. Some of this rhetoric contained religious references. Jewish settlers, acting either alone or in groups, assaulted Palestinians and destroyed Palestinian property. Most instances of violence or property destruction reportedly committed against Palestinians did not result in arrests or convictions during the reporting period.

Palestinian media published and broadcast material criticizing the Israeli occupation, including dismissing Jewish connections to Jerusalem. During the reporting period official PA media contained almost no derogatory statements about Israel and Jews. However, other Palestinian media not under the control of the PA, particularly those controlled by Hamas, continued to use inflammatory language during the reporting period.

Unofficial Palestinian television broadcast content sometimes praised suicide bombing and holy war until Palestine is free of Jewish control. Some children's programs aired on unofficial Palestinian television legitimized the killing of Israelis and Jews.

Unofficial Palestinian media frequently published and broadcast anti-Semitic content. Rhetoric by Palestinian terrorist groups included expressions of anti-Semitism, as did sermons by some Muslim religious leaders carried on Palestinian television.

Harassment of Messianic Jews (people who identify as Jews and follow Jewish traditions but who believe Jesus was the Messiah) by Orthodox Jews continued during the reporting period. Orthodox Jewish groups published announcements in religious newspapers calling Messianic Jews "dangerous" and calling for their expulsion from Israeli areas.

Press reported an increase in incidents involving ultra-Orthodox "modesty squads." These squads enforce observance of a conservative lifestyle in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods. In one instance, the press reported in August 2008 that seven ultra-Orthodox men attacked a 31-year-old Jewish woman in her apartment because they suspected her of having "improper relations" with men. Other women reported receiving threatening phone calls and being harassed for their failure to observe an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle.

Established Christian groups in general did not welcome less-established churches. A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, encountered opposition to their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims, who opposed their proselytizing, and from Christians, who feared the new arrivals might disrupt the status quo.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. Government officials discuss religious freedom with the PA as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly met with religious representatives to ensure their legitimate grievances were reported and addressed. The consulate general maintained a high level of contact with representatives of the Jerusalem Waqf. U.S. Government officials had frequent contact with Muslim leaders throughout Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. The consulate also maintained regular contact with leaders of the Christian and Jewish communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank. During the reporting period, the Consul General and Consulate General officers met with the Greek, Latin, and Armenian Patriarchs, leaders of the Syrian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches, as well as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Consulate General officers also met with rabbis, other central figures from Orthodox religious groups, and representatives of other Jewish groups.

During the reporting period, the Consulate General investigated a range of charges including allegations of damage to places of worship, incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites. Consulate General officers met with representatives of the Bethlehem Christian community and traveled to the area to investigate charges of PA mistreatment of Christians. The Consulate General raised the issue of seizure of Christian-owned land in discussions with PA officials and with the Jerusalem Municipality.

OMAN

The Basic Law prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the freedom to practice religious rites as long as doing so does not disrupt public order; in accordance with tradition, it declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the basis of legislation. Government policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion, but within defined parameters that placed some limitations on the right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period; however, the Government did lift previously imposed limitations on the number of religious workers in the country and shortened the process for granting permission to religious leaders to enter the country from two months to one week.

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 119,498 square miles and a population of 3.3 million, of whom 2.4 million are citizens. The Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation, but almost all citizens are either Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims, with Shi'a Muslims forming a small but well-integrated minority of less than 5 percent of the population, concentrated in the capital area and along the northern coast. Ibadhism, a form of Islam distinct from Shi'ism and the "orthodox" schools of Sunnism, historically has been the country's dominant religious group, and the Sultan is a member of the Ibadhi community.

The majority of non-Muslims are noncitizen immigrant workers from South Asia, although there are small communities of ethnic Indians (Hindus and Christians) who have been naturalized.

Non-Muslim religious communities, made up primarily of expatriate workers, individually constitute less than 5 percent of the population and include various groups of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha'is, and Christians. Christian

communities are centered in the major urban areas of Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah, and include Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and various Protestant congregations. These groups tend to organize along linguistic and ethnic lines. More than fifty different Christian groups, fellowships, and assemblies are active in the Muscat metropolitan area. There are two Hindu temples and one Sikh temple in Muscat, as well as additional temples located on worksites, where the religious community located there is large enough to support them.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law provides for the freedom to practice religious rites as long as doing so does not disrupt public order; in accordance with tradition, it declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the basis of legislation. It also prohibits discrimination based on religion.

Apostasy is not a criminal offense under the law. Citizens who convert from Islam to another religion, however, may face problems under the Personal Status and Family Legal Code, which specifically prohibits a father who leaves Islam from retaining paternal rights over his children; however, this law has not been tested in practice. The law does not specifically prohibit proselytizing, but the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) could stop individuals or groups from engaging in it if the Ministry received complaints.

Non-Muslim communities are allowed to practice their beliefs without interference on land specifically donated by the Sultan for the purpose of collective worship.

In 2006 MERA issued a circular to non-Muslim religious leaders and diplomatic missions reaffirming an individual's right to practice his or her own religious activities according to his or her values, customs, and traditions. The circular also informs them that gatherings of a religious nature are not allowed in private homes or any other location except government-approved houses of worship; however, the Government did not actively enforce the prohibition. The circular, which formalized existing but previously unwritten government policy, also requires groups to obtain approval from MERA before issuing religious publications outside their membership; this regulation does not differ from the requirement for government approval of any publication in Oman. Religious groups are requested to notify MERA prior to importing religious materials and submit a copy for the

MERA files; however, the Ministry does not review all imported religious material for approval.

Citizens have the right to sue the Government for violation of the Basic Law granting them religious freedom; however, this right has never been tested in court.

Article 209 of the Penal Code prescribes a prison sentence and fine for anyone who publicly blasphemes God or His prophets, commits an affront to religious groups by spoken or written word, or breaches the peace of a lawful religious gathering; this article could be used to limit religious expression. However, there were no reports of any prosecutions under this statute during the reporting period.

Laws governing family and personal status are adjudicated by the country's civil courts, according to the Personal Status and Family Legal Code, which is based on principles of Shari'a. Article 282 of the code exempts non-Muslims from the code's provisions, allowing them to follow their own religious rules pertaining to family or personal status. Shi'a Muslims may resolve family and personal status cases according to Shi'a jurisprudence outside of the courts, but retain the right to transfer their case to a civil court if they cannot find a resolution.

The Government funds the salary for some Ibadhi and Sunni Imams.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year (Hijra), the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's Ascension, and Eid al-Fitr.

All religious organizations must be registered by MERA. The Ministry recognizes the Protestant Church of Oman, the Catholic Diocese of Oman, the al Amana Center (interdenominational Christian), the Hindu Mahajan Temple, and the Anwar al-Ghubaira Trading Company in Muscat (Sikh) as the official sponsors for non-Islamic religious communities. Groups seeking registration must request meeting and worship space from one of these sponsor organizations, which are responsible for recording the group's doctrinal adherence, the names of its leaders, and the number of active members, and for submitting this information to the Ministry. Members of non-Islamic communities were free to maintain links with fellow adherents abroad and undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. The Government permitted clergy from abroad to enter the country to teach or lead worship under the sponsorship of registered religious organizations, which must apply to MERA for approval at least one week in advance of the visiting clergy's entry.

Officials at MERA state there is no limit on the number of groups that can be registered. New religious groups unaffiliated with one of the main communities must gain ministerial approval before being registered. While the Government has not published the rules, regulations, or criteria for approval, the Ministry generally considers the group's size, theology or belief system, and availability of other worship opportunities before granting approval. The Ministry employs similar criteria before granting approval for new Muslim groups to form. According to government regulations, mosques must be built at least 1 kilometer (two-thirds of a mile) apart and only on government-owned land.

Leaders of all religious groups must be registered with MERA. The Ministry has a formal licensing process for imams, and unlicensed lay members are prohibited from leading prayers in mosques. Lay members of non-Islamic communities may lead worship if they are specified as leaders in their group's registration application. Foreigners on tourist visas are prohibited from preaching, teaching, or leading worship.

Islam is taught from a cultural and historical perspective in public and private schools, and Islamic studies are required for Muslim students in public school grades K-12. Non-Muslim students are exempt from this requirement, and many private schools provided alternate religious studies instruction.

Although the Government records religion on birth certificates, it is not printed on other official identity documents.

Women are permitted to wear the hijab in official photographs; however, full veils are not allowed.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Buddhists requested permission to hold worship meetings, and MERA granted this permission. However, by the end of the reporting period, they were not able to find a corporate sponsor to provide facilities, and the Government had not yet granted them land.

The 2006 MERA-issued circular stated that gatherings of a religious nature are not allowed in private homes or any other location except government-approved houses of worship. This limited the ability of some adherents who were physically distant from officially sanctioned locations or who lacked reliable transportation to practice their religion collectively or engage in communal religious rites. MERA enforced the prohibition on group worship in unsanctioned locations only when it received complaints. On the whole, churches and temples voluntarily abided by the 2006 circular, providing space on their compounds for worship; however, the lack of space in the locations sanctioned by the Government for collective worship effectively limited the number of groups that could operate.

Private groups that promote interfaith dialogue were permitted to exist, as long as the discussions were not an attempt to cause Muslims to recant their Islamic beliefs.

On December 7, 2008, the Government issued a circular stating that the country would celebrate Eid Al-Adha on December 9 and informed all citizens that anyone who prayed on a different date would be subject to legal action.

MERA monitored sermons at mosques to ensure imams did not discuss political topics. The Government expected all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts distributed monthly by the Ministry.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to return to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, MERA lifted the restriction on the number of religious leaders allowed to enter the country on "church visas." Further, it reduced the amount of time to obtain permission to enter from two months to one week.

The Government, through MERA, publishes *Al Tasamoh* ("*Tolerance*"), a periodical devoted to broadening the dialogue within Islam and promoting respectful discussion of differences with other faiths and cultures.

The Government sponsored forums for examining differing interpretations of Islam, Christian views, and philosophical approaches that are not tied to a specific religion. Government-sponsored interfaith dialogues took place on a regular basis. During the reporting period, MERA hosted several Christian and Muslim scholars and lecturers of various schools of thought to discuss interfaith relations and tolerance in Islamic traditions, including a Christian professor from Cambridge who addressed the topic "Seeking Muslim, Christian, and Jewish wisdom in the 21st century," related to the "Common Word," a worldwide interfaith initiative.

The Institute for Shari'a Sciences (home to a bachelor's program in which many religious leaders are educated) also hosts speakers on similar themes in the Grand Mosque series. Occasionally, the Institute hosts non-Muslim students from foreign institutions for extended periods to perform in-depth research on Islam.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Discrimination was largely absent.

Anti-Semitism was present in the reporting period in the private media, with anti-Semitic editorial cartoons depicting stereotypical and negative images of Jews, along with Jewish symbols. These expressions occurred primarily in the privately owned daily newspaper *Al-Watan*. A senior columnist at privately owned sister papers *The Times of Oman/Al-Shabiba* on several occasions attacked Israeli actions and policies in anti-Semitic tones, including citations of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

A local interfaith group, focusing on improving Muslim/Christian understanding, regularly sponsored exchange programs for leaders of both faiths, hosted scholars-in-residence, and worked closely with MERA on many of their projects.

Both state-owned and private papers have increasingly broadened coverage of religious issues, positively addressing interfaith dialogue and encouraging tolerance among sects of Islam and between Islam and other faiths.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to

raise its concern with MERA about space limitations created by the 2006 circular prohibiting group worship in private homes and encouraged the Government to ensure all groups that wished to meet had a location available for religious practices. The Embassy also worked closely with MERA to promote interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue. Embassy officials also met regularly with representatives of Islamic and non-Islamic groups to discuss religious freedom concerns.

PAKISTAN

The country is an Islamic republic. Islam is the state religion, and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam. The Constitution states that "subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion;" in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally, "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam."

The Government took some steps to improve its treatment of religious minorities during the reporting period. The democratically elected Government appointed a Roman Catholic as Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs and upgraded his position to a cabinet minister. The Government allocated a 5 percent quota for religious minorities in all federal jobs, and directed provincial governments to implement the same at the provincial level. The Government also decided to celebrate Minorities' Day on August 11 every year nationwide. Despite these steps, serious problems remained. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different religious belief fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities. Specific laws that discriminate against religious minorities include anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws that provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and legal bars to the practice of its religious beliefs. Members of other Islamic sects also claimed governmental discrimination.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread, and societal violence against such groups occurred. Non-governmental actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations. A domestic insurgency led by Sunni Taliban elements increased acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities and exacerbated existing sectarian tensions. An extremist insurgency increased its efforts to impose its extremist religious views on the majority. Extremists demanded that Muslims with progressive views, particularly women, follow a strict version of Islam and threatened dire consequences if they did not abide by it.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. Embassy officials closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities, worked to eliminate the teaching of religious intolerance, and encouraged amendment of the blasphemy laws.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles and a population of 173 million. Official figures on religious demography, based on the 1998 census, showed that approximately 97 percent of the population was Muslim. Groups comprising 2 percent of the population or less include Hindus, Christians, and others, including Ahmadis. The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni, with a Shi'a minority of approximately 20 percent. According to the Ministry of Minorities Affairs, Sikhs have approximately 30,000 adherents and Buddhists 20,000. The number of Parsis (Zoroastrians), according to a Parsi community center in Karachi, dropped to 1,822 in 2009 as compared to 2,039 in June 2006. The Baha'i claimed that the number of Baha'is is growing in Pakistan, with approximately 30,000 adherents. The number of Ahmadis living in Pakistan, according to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, is nearly 600,000, although it is difficult to establish an accurate estimate because Ahmadis, who are legally prohibited from identifying themselves as Muslims, generally choose to not identify themselves as non-Muslims. Some tribes in Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) practiced traditional animist religious beliefs; other religious groups include Kalasha, Kihals, and Jains.

Less than 0.5 percent of the population, as recorded in the 1998 census, was silent on religious affiliation or claimed not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure was such that few persons would claim no religious affiliation.

No data were available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. Religious beliefs often played an important part in daily life. Most Muslims offered prayers on Fridays, Islam's holy day. Many prayed daily. During the month of Ramadan, even less observant Muslims fasted and attended services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Roman Catholics worshiped regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu-speaking Catholics did so. Attendance at Hindu and Sikh religious services increased during festivals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. It also declares that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religious beliefs freely; however, the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion, particularly on Ahmadis.

A 1974 constitutional amendment declares that Ahmadis are non-Muslims. Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, referring to their religious beliefs as Islam, preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, inviting others to accept Ahmadi teachings, or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of the Section is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. Other religious communities were generally free to observe their religious obligations; however, religious minorities are legally restricted from public display of certain religious images and, due to discriminatory legislation and social pressure, are often afraid to profess freely their religious beliefs.

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interest of the "glory of Islam." The consequences for contravening the country's blasphemy laws are death for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting another's religious feelings. Some individuals bring charges under these laws to settle personal scores or to intimidate vulnerable Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. Under the Anti-Terrorism Act, any action, including speech, intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe the accused is guilty; however, the bail provision of the law is selectively applied.

Any speech or conduct that injures another's religious feelings, including those of minority religious groups, is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment. In cases in which a minority group claimed its religious feelings were insulted, however, the blasphemy laws were rarely enforced, and cases were rarely brought to the legal system. A 2005 law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), this law was not uniformly enforced.

The Penal Code incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions that reflect differences in civil, criminal, and

Islamic jurisprudence. The Federal Shari'a Court and the Shari'a bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal court under the Hudood Ordinance, which criminalizes rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling; judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslim. The Federal Shari'a Court may overturn any legislation judged inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. In March 2005, however, the Supreme Court Chief Justice ruled that the Federal Shari'a Court had no jurisdiction to review a decision by a provincial high court even if the Federal Shari'a Court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seeking punishment through the court system. The "Qisaas and Diyat" law calls for either providing retribution for murder and other violent crimes (Qisaas) or compensation money to the victim of the crime (Diyat). Religious minorities claimed that the amounts of monetary restitution were far higher for minority offenders and far lower for minority victims than for Muslims.

The 2006 Women's Protection Bill amended the Hudood Ordinance and moved cases of rape and adultery to secular rather than Shari'a courts. Previously, the Hudood Ordinance often relied on harsh and discriminatory interpretations of Qur'anic standards of evidence and punishment that applied equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carry different weight. Approximately 2,500 women have been released from prison since former President Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinance. Many were unable to return to their homes because of social ostracism. A few others remained in custody, and most were housed in government-run shelters. The women, who were originally arrested under the Hudood Ordinance on charges of fornication, adultery, and possession of liquor, are now having their cases heard under the Women's Protection Bill. According to the Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid, the number of adultery-related cases against women considerably dropped during 2008-09.

The Government designates religious affiliation on passports and requests religious information in national identity card applications. A citizen must have a national identity card to vote. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear their belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-

Muslims, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. As a result, Ahmadis continued to boycott elections.

The Constitution provides for "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle, the Government does not restrict organized religious groups from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. In practice, however, religious minorities suffered from restrictions of this right. District-level authorities consistently refused to grant permission to construct non-Muslim places of worship, especially for Ahmadiyya and Baha'i communities, citing the need to maintain public order. There is no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship; however, Ahmadis are forbidden from calling them mosques. District governments often refuse to grant Ahmadis permission to hold events publicly; therefore, they hold their meetings in members' homes. The Government can shut down these gatherings if neighbors report hearing the recitation of Qur'anic verses.

The Government provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947. Minority communities claimed the Government did not spend adequate funds on the protection and upkeep of those properties. The Government collected a 2.5 percent tax (zakat) on all Sunni Muslims and distributed the funds to Sunni mosques, madrassahs, and charities. No similar requirement was imposed on other religious groups.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Zakat, and Ushr, which is primarily responsible for organizing participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages, in addition to safeguarding religious freedom, claims it spends 30 percent of its annual budget to assist indigent minorities, repair minority places of worship, establish minority-run small development projects, and celebrate minority festivals. Religious minorities questioned these figures, observing that localities and villages that are home to minority citizens go without basic civic amenities. The Ministry has on its masthead a Qur'anic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God."

The Ministry of Minorities Affairs, a stand-alone ministry since 2004, has the "aim to protect the rights of minorities as envisaged under the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan." In November 2008 Shahbaz Bhatti, a Roman Catholic, was appointed

Federal Minister for Minorities' Affairs in a move the Christian community and other religious groups throughout Pakistan welcomed. This was the first time the position had received the stature of a cabinet minister; in the past, the portfolio for minorities was entrusted to a lower-ranking official working under another federal minister.

The Government observes Islamic holy days as national holidays.

The Constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination is also prohibited.

Islamiyyat (Islamic studies) is compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam, they are not offered parallel studies in their own religious beliefs. In some schools non-Muslim students may study Akhlaqiyyat, or Ethics.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely based on religious affiliation. Government officials stated that the only factors affecting admission to government educational institutions were students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms. This declaration is also required for private educational institutions, including universities. Muslim students must declare in writing that they believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, another measure that singles out Ahmadis. Non-Muslims must have their religious affiliation verified by the head of their local religious community.

Parents may send children to religious schools, at the family's expense. Private schools are free to teach or not to teach religious studies as they choose.

Islamic schools, or madrassahs, are traditional institutions for Muslims seeking a purely religious education. In many rural communities, madrassahs are the only form of education available. In recent years some madrassahs have taught extremist doctrine in support of terrorism. In an attempt to curb the spread of extremism, the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance requires all madrassahs to register with one of the five independent boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. Approximately 15,725 madrassahs had registered by the end of the reporting

period; however, many civil society organizations and education experts disputed the statistics on the number of registered and unregistered madrassahs.

A 2005 framework for cooperative registration of madrassahs, including provision of financial and educational data and a prohibition on the teaching of sectarian or religious hatred and violence, remained stalled due to political upheaval and jurisdictional battles within the previous government. The Government and the independent madrassah boards had agreed to a phased introduction to all madrassahs of secular subjects, including mathematics, English, and science. The civilian government that took office in 2008 listed madrassah reform as a priority.

The Government announced, but has not approved, a uniform curriculum for madrassahs, with a more secular tone. The Chief Secretary of the Federal Madrassah Board (Wafaq-ul-Madaris), Maulana Mohammad Hanif Jalandhri, opposed this policy in April 2009, stating that no interference by the Government would be tolerated and no revision of madrassah curriculum would be accepted without consultation and approval of the Board.

All wafaqs continued to mandate the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance, and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. Inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with secular subjects. Wafaqs also restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Examination concerns remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Karachi, and northern Balochistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly, the Dawa schools, run by Jamaat-ud-Dawa, a charitable front for the banned Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization. Following the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, attributed to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, the government of the province of Punjab took over management of several Jamaat-ud-Dawa institutions.

In an effort to end Taliban violence in the Swat valley, the NWFP government, led by the Awami National Party (ANP), concluded a peace deal in February 2009 with extremist organization Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) that included a commitment to implement the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation (NAR) in the Malakand division of the NWFP. In April 2009 President Asif Ali Zardari signed the NAR, making it effective. Based on previous attempts in 1994 and 1998 to establish Shari'a (interpreted locally as "swift justice"), the NAR establishes limits for deciding civil and criminal cases, re-creates qazi (religious judges) chosen by

the state, and establishes a local appeals court whose judges are selected by the Peshawar High Court. Civil society in general and the minority religious community in particular expressed concern about the effects of creating an alternative religious-based system of justice in Swat. NAR defenders pointed out that, under the Constitution, all laws must already conform to Islam. In this respect the NAR is not a new regulation.

The deal was signed with the expectation that local militants would disarm in return for the implementation of Shari'a through the NAR. After the President signed the NAR, however, the militants refused to disarm, and extended their patrols to Buner District of the Malakand Division. Amid growing incidents of violence by the militants, the army launched a military operation on April 26, 2009, resulting in the largest mass migration in the country's history since partition and clearing much of the territory claimed by the Taliban.

At the end of the reporting period, the army was completing operations in Malakand, and the area was back in the control of the NWFP government, but the NAR had not yet been implemented.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, the sale of Ahmadi religious literature is banned. The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to another's religious beliefs.

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony to promote moderation, tolerance, and minority rights.

The Government does not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice, nor did it take steps to prevent parents from teaching their children religious instruction in the privacy of the home.

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religious group; however, the Constitution requires that the President and Prime Minister be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of Parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. Government employees are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their religious beliefs.

Missionaries (except Ahmadis) are permitted in the country and can proselytize, as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge they

are not Muslim. Missionaries are required to have specific visas valid from two to five years and are allowed one entry into the country per year. Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems were common.

In accordance with the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Government banned activities of and membership in several religious extremist and terrorist groups. The Anti-Terrorism Act allows the Government to use special streamlined courts to try violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state; however, many of the groups that the Government banned remained active.

The Government does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages are performed and registered according to one's religious group. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal upon conversion to Islam. If a non-Muslim female converts to Islam, and her marriage was performed according to her previous religious beliefs, the marriage is considered dissolved. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. The only way the marriage can be legitimated and the children made eligible for inheritance is for the husband to convert to Islam. The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religious group are considered illegitimate, and the Government can take custody of the children.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular religious group, religious belief, or interpretation of religious doctrine. The Government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to prior links to terrorist and extremist organizations. There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The seats are allocated to the political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the assembly. The National Assembly has 10 members of minority religious groups, and minorities are represented in most tiers of local government, including union councils, tehsil councils, and district councils. Minorities were also elected to the provincial assemblies: three non-Muslims in the NWFP, eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, and three in Balochistan.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom.

Since 1983 Ahmadis have been prohibited from holding public conferences or gatherings and from holding their annual conference. Ahmadis are banned from preaching and were prohibited from traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj or other religious pilgrimages. Ahmadiyya publications are banned from public sale, but they published religious literature in large quantities for a limited circulation.

The Constitution guarantees the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, but in practice these rights were restricted for Ahmadis. According to media reports, authorities continued to conduct surveillance on Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadiyya mosques reportedly were closed; others reportedly were desecrated or their construction was stopped.

Public pressure routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights and forced judges to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni orthodoxy. Discrimination charges against religious minorities were rarely brought before the judiciary. According to several NGOs, cases against Christians and Ahmadis continued to increase during the reporting period; however, the judiciary, even at the lower levels, acted more judiciously in dealing with these cases as compared with previous reporting periods. NGOs reported that cases against both the local Christian and Hindu communities continued but to a lesser degree and that social discrimination remained at high levels. There was generally a long period between filing a case and the first court appearance. Lower courts were frequently subject to intimidation, delayed issuing decisions, and refused bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Original trial courts usually denied bail in blasphemy cases, arguing that defendants facing the death penalty were likely to flee. As with the majority of cases in the country, many defendants appealed the denial of bail, but bail was often not granted in advance of the trial.

In contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of district governments restricting the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ. Such images were openly displayed and sold in Christian communities.

Religious belief or specific adherence to a religious group was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties. All political parties, except religious parties, had a separate minority wing.

Foreign books must pass government censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines were imported freely but were subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content.

The Government sometimes funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. Due to the passport requirements to list religious affiliation and denounce the Ahmadi prophet, Ahmadis were restricted from going on the Hajj because they were unable to declare themselves as Muslims. Due to the fact that the Government does not recognize Israel, religious believers regardless of religious affiliation were unable to travel to Israel on pilgrimage. This especially affected Baha'is, since the Baha'i World Centre, the spiritual and administrative heart of the community, is located in northern Israel.

Although discrimination continued to exist, particularly against Hindus, during the reporting period, there were no reports of discrimination against Ahmadis and Christians when they applied for entry to universities and medical schools. During this period, Shi'a leaders said they were not subjected to discrimination in hiring for the civil service or admission to government institutions of higher learning.

Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contended that a "glass ceiling" prevented their promotion to senior positions and that certain government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. The Government discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith and Barelvi, in hiring clergy for government mosques and faculty members for Islamic government colleges.

Members of minority religious groups volunteered for military service in small numbers, and there were no official obstacles to their advancement; however, in practice non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities.

The public school curriculum included derogatory remarks in textbooks against minority religious groups, particularly Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews, and the teaching of religious intolerance was widespread. The Government continued to revise curriculum to eliminate such teachings and remove Islamic overtones from secular subjects.

Officials used bureaucratic demands and bribes to delay religious groups trying to build houses of worship or obtain land. Although Ahmadis were prevented from building houses of worship, Sunni Muslim groups built mosques and shrines without government permission, at times in violation of zoning ordinances and on government-owned lands.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police reportedly tortured and mistreated those in custody and at times engaged in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether adherence to particular religious beliefs was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadiyya communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates, including lack of access to spiritual resources. Conversion to other minority religious groups generally took place in secret to avoid societal backlash.

Ahmadiyya leaders claimed the Government used sections of the Penal Code against their members for religious reasons. Authorities often accused converts to the Ahmadiyya community of blasphemy, violations of anti-Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. The Government used anti-Ahmadi laws to target and harass Ahmadis. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting and for naming their children Muhammad. According to the Rabwah-based Jamaat-e-Ahmadiya, as of April 2009, 88 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their religious beliefs: 18 under blasphemy laws, 68 under Ahmadi-specific laws, and two under other clauses.

According to data provided by Ahmadiyya leaders, at the end of the reporting period, 12 Ahmadis were in prison, of whom one was facing life imprisonment, three were facing death sentences, five had been arrested under blasphemy charges, and three others were awaiting trial. Most of the arrests took place in Rabwah, Kotli, Nankana Sahib, Kotri, and Sargodha. The Ahmadiyya community claimed the arrests were groundless and based on the detainees' religious beliefs. Several criminal cases, ranging from killings to destruction of property, were filed against prominent members of the Ahmadiyya community during the reporting period. The cases remained unprosecuted, and the accused were allowed to post bail.

On June 30, 2009, a fistfight erupted into an alleged incident of blasphemy that sparked a mob attack on a Christian community in the district of Kasur, Punjab, prompting 700 persons to flee their homes. Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti offered compensation to the affected families. Several NGOs remained concerned about the incident.

On June 23, 2009, Compass Direct News reported that police imprisoned Arshad Masih, a Christian man from Gujranwala, in Sialkot jail and abused him in custody. Reportedly, police abused Masih because his father was a Christian preacher. Although he was officially charged with robbery, he was later granted bail on the strength of testimony that he was not among the robbers. Due to the physical abuse he suffered in custody, he was sent to the Allama Iqbal Memorial Hospital. According to Compass Direct News, authorities allegedly ordered him to be silent about the abuse.

On May 28, 2009, Mian Laiq Ahmad, an Ahmadi trader in Faisalabad, died after unknown assailants brutally attacked him. According to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, he was the fifth Ahmadi killed in 2009 and the 101st killed since anti-Ahmadi laws were introduced in 1984.

In May 2009 two students of a seminary in Chakwal, Punjab, entered the home of an Ahmadi, Mubashir Ahmed, and tried to behead him. Neighbors intervened and saved his life, but he was severely injured. One student was caught and brought to a local police station and the other escaped. Police booked a case and were trying to find the other assailant.

On April 17, 2009, authorities released from prison Catholics James Masih and Buta Masih, who were convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to 10 years in prison in November 2006 for allegedly burning a Qur'an.

On March 4, 2009, 15 Ahmadis were charged under Section 298c of the Penal Code for calling their place of worship a mosque and for offering Eid prayers there. They were also charged with posing as Muslims. According to reports, the arrests were the result of a business dispute.

A 17-year-old student, Naveed Aziz, and Pastor Shafiq Masih were accused of blasphemy in January 2009 when a fellow student noticed "blasphemous material" in Aziz's bag.

In January 2009 police arrested four Ahmadi teenagers and an adult in Layyah, Punjab, on charges of blasphemy. Because there was no supporting evidence, the accused were not indicted; however, they remain incarcerated more than five months after their arrest. Some local clerics reportedly attempted to incite communal tensions following the incident. Allegedly, a local Member of the National Assembly from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, Saqlain Shah, provided political support for the agitation. At the federal level, the Ministry of Minorities Affairs tried to win the release of the teenagers but had not succeeded by the end of the reporting period.

In January 2009 police arrested Hector Aleem in Rawalpindi on charges of sending a blasphemous text message from his cell phone. After a hearing by an antiterrorism court, Aleem, who is a member of an agency that works for Christians' rights, was cleared of the blasphemy charges but not of abetting a crime. A government official told Compass Direct News the decision was heavily influenced by religious extremists telling the judge, "If you release him (Aleem), then we will kill him outside."

In January 2009 an Ahmadi shopkeeper, Saeed Ahmed, was shot and killed in Kotri, Sindh Province. Ahmed was killed because of his faith, a spokesman for the Ahmadiyya community claimed in a press release.

In September 2008 authorities arrested 10 Ahmadis under Ahmadi-specific sections of the Penal Code. On October 11, 2008, eight more Ahmadis were arrested using the same case number and under the same sections of the code.

The Punjab provincial government permitted Muslim religious leaders to hold an anti-Ahmadi conference in Rabwah on September 7, 2008, on the anniversary of the constitutional amendment that declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims.

In 2008, an antiterrorism court acquitted five persons who were arrested for the 2005 attack on Ahmadi worshippers in Mandi Bahauddin, Punjab that resulted in the killing of eight and injuring of 20.

In March 2008, police arrested Ahmadi Altaf Husain in Kabeerwala on charges of desecrating the Qur'an. Altaf Hussain was released in July 2008 by a District Court in Khanewal, Punjab.

There was no update in the January 2008 arrest of an Ahmadi in Wazirabad, Punjab, on charges of distributing Ahmadi-related pamphlets. He was granted bail in March 2008 and forced to leave the area after receiving numerous death threats.

In January 2008 police in Nankana Sahib, Punjab, charged an Ahmadi businessman, Manzur Ahmed, with destroying pages that included religious inscriptions. At the end of the reporting period, he remained behind bars for destruction of holy material.

In September 2007 police accused Mumtaz Ali, an Ahmadi, of subscribing to, receiving, and subsequently distributing the newsletter of the local Ahmadiyya community. He was taken into police custody for 10 days and released because of his age. He died in October 2007, but police refused to drop the charges and threatened his family with imprisonment if the household continued to receive the newsletter. The family has left Rajan Pur, Punjab, and moved to a different city.

In November 2007 three Ahmadis were arrested in Sargodha, Punjab, on charges of proselytizing when they invited other locals to their places of worship. They were given bail in mid-February 2008. There was no update on this case at the end of the reporting period.

In December 2007 Larkana police arrested 21 Ahmadis on charges of gathering and worshipping like Muslims after neighbors told the police that they heard Islamic verses being recited in the home of one of the members. All involved were released by the end of the reporting period.

Authorities routinely used blasphemy laws to harass religious minorities and vulnerable Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Authorities detained and convicted individuals on spurious charges. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely.

According to the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), in 2008 at least 75 persons were victimized in 24 cases registered under the blasphemy laws. Punjab had the largest share, with 67 percent of the blasphemy allegations and cases registered; 21 percent of the cases were reported in Sindh. Of the 75 persons, 26 were identified as Muslims, six Christians, and two Hindus. The number of Ahmadis is unknown. In addition to the Ahmadis charged in 2008, police charged the entire Ahmadi populations in Rabwah and Kotli with blasphemy in June 2008 for celebrating 100 years of Caliph-ship and constructing a mosque for the

community. The NCJP stated: "Generally we do not request bail because of security. Blasphemy suspects are often safest in prison under police protection."

On June 18, 2008, Mohammad Shafeeq Latif was sentenced to death for blasphemy after he allegedly defiled the Qur'an and used derogatory language to refer to the Prophet Mohammad. Shafeeq was arrested in 2006. He remained jailed in Sialkot, Punjab.

In June 2008 six Ahmadis were arrested and charged with blasphemy in Kotri, Sindh. The arrests took place after a dispute over construction of an Ahmadiyya prayer center and protests from mullahs of Tahaffuz Khatam-e-Nabuwat, an anti-Ahmadiyya religious clerical group.

According to Compass Direct News, in May 2008 police arrested Robin Sardar, a Christian, after a mob attacked his home in Punjab because he had allegedly committed blasphemy. Sardar, who denied the charges, was held in Punjab's Gujranwala Central Jail. His wife and six children abandoned their home for fear of new attacks. According to reports, local Islamist groups threatened to kill Sardar if he was acquitted. On November 4, 2008, Sardar was released after his accuser indicated there had been a misunderstanding.

In May 2008 Muslims filed a blasphemy case against Pastor Frank John when he was conducting a religious convention at Green Town Christian Colony, Lahore, Punjab. When Christians gathered for the convention, local Muslims stated that no one would be allowed to use the speakers for prayers. The police filed a first information report (FIR) against the pastor on May 3, 2008. Pastor John was not arrested, although tensions between the Christian and Muslim communities remained.

In April 2008 in the Karachi Korangi Industrial Area, employees beat to death Jagdesh Kumar, a Hindu employee, after he allegedly made blasphemous comments against Islam. Factory guards attempted to save Jagdesh by taking him into protective custody, and a small contingent of police was called. The Karachi police superintendent later suspended the police officers after it was determined they did not take the appropriate actions to save the employee's life.

By the end of the reporting period, a case had been registered against Abdul Malik, a resident of Burewala, Punjab, for making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad in September 2007, but he had not been arrested. Islamic

organizations staged several protests throughout Lahore, demanding that Malik be arrested and punished for the alleged blasphemy.

Younis Masih, a Christian, remained under a death sentence on blasphemy charges for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad during a dispute with a Muslim cleric about loud music accompanying a nighttime religious ceremony. In May 2007, the district court in Lahore sentenced Masih to death. The case was on appeal at the end of the reporting period.

At the end of the reporting period, Sattar Masih, a Catholic Christian beaten by a mob and arrested by police in 2007 for allegedly writing blasphemous words against the Prophet Muhammad, remained in prison. Police reportedly tortured him in prison to obtain a confession.

At the end of the reporting period, Salamat Masih remained in prison and his family in hiding after officials accused him and four members of his family, all Christians from Toba Tek Singh, of desecrating papers bearing the Prophet Muhammad's name in 2007.

In March 2007 a mob of Muslims attacked Amanat Masih, a Christian, for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Police arrested Masih for blasphemy. At the end of the reporting period, he remained in prison.

In September 2006 police arrested five Ahmadiis working for an Ahmadiyya publication, *Al Fazl*, on blasphemy charges. According to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiya, all were released but police gave them strict warnings to stop publishing. The provincial and district governments were pressured to shut down the publication activities of all Punjabi Ahmadiis after this case.

In July 2006 courts released on bail Hafiz Afzal Rehman and Haji Latif, who had been held in a Lahore prison on blasphemy charges since 2004. Their trials were pending, and both men were on bail with no hearings set at the end of the reporting period.

Minority communities claimed the Government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims and that the policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities. These groups also accused the Government of inaction in cases of attacks by extremist groups on places of worship that belonged to minority groups.

There were no updates on the July 2007 case of a Chinese Uighur Muslim who was reportedly detained and forcibly returned to China. There were no reports that the individual was arrested because of his religious beliefs. There were credible reports that the Government of China has tortured and executed Uighur Muslims who have been forcibly returned.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in the brickmaking and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this illegal practice.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed government actions to stem the problem were inadequate. Representatives of the Hindu community in Sindh claim 15 to 20 Hindu families per year were subject to forced conversion (usually related to familial debts). Human rights groups highlighted the increased phenomenon of local actors kidnapping young Hindu women, particularly in Karachi and other parts of Sindh, forcing them to convert to Islam, and then forcing them to marry their kidnappers.

In September 2007 Muhammad Ramzan abducted Tahira Salamat, a Christian from Multan, forced her to convert to Islam and then to marry him. At the end of the reporting period, Salamat was living with Ramzan, and the Lahore High Court had closed the original case against Ramzan. According to the NCJP, the case was withdrawn after Salamat submitted statements that she had willingly converted and was living with her husband without any pressure.

In April 2009 a minority minister in the Sindh Assembly claimed 18 Hindu women had been abducted and forced to convert to Islam, and that one of them was allegedly killed.

According to NCJP, several cases of forced conversion and abduction were reported in Punjab Province in Faisalabad, Lahore, and Gujranwala. Of the 39 women who were abducted and forced to convert in 2008, 34 cases occurred in Lahore alone, as recorded by the NCJP. A majority of these women were Christian, and two were Hindus.

On March 29, 2009, Sana, a Christian woman, was abducted, raped, and forcibly converted to Islam in Sainwala, Punjab.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of religious groups by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. Secretary of State under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and by armed sectarian extremist groups with strong links to such organizations.

Sectarian violence continued in different parts of the country during the reporting period, with attacks on the Shi'a minority, particularly in D.I. Khan, Quetta, Tank, D.G. Khan, Gilgit, and Kurram Agency.

Throughout the reporting period, attacks, threats, and violence by Islamic extremists increased across the country, especially in the NWFP.

More than 300 Sikh families left the Malakand and Swat valley area in the wake of ongoing military operations. Most of the displaced families took refuge in Gurdwara Punja Sahib in Hasanabdal. There are approximately 6,000 Sikhs in Swat, the second largest minority (after Christians) in the restive valley.

Targeted assassinations of clergy remained a key tactic of several groups, including banned sectarian organization Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP), terrorist organization Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), and sectarian organizations Sunni Tehrike (ST) and Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP). SSP and LJ targeted both Shi'a and Barelvis, whereas ST and SMP targeted Deobandis.

Throughout the reporting period, there were numerous reports of Islamic militant attacks on barber shops and stores selling music in the NWFP and FATA.

LJ continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings during the reporting period.

Al-Qa'ida-linked organizations maintained networks in the country, and its supporters periodically issued anti-Semitic statements.

On June 12, 2009, a suicide bomber attacked a mosque in Nowshera during Friday prayers, killing 10 and injuring 100 persons. On the same day, Dr. Mufti Sarfraz Naeemi and five others were killed in a suicide bomb blast at Jamia Naeemia in Lahore. Seven others were injured in the attack. According to news reports on the cleric's killing, Naeemi's followers believed he was targeted because of his vocal support of military operations against the Taliban whom he publicly opposed.

On June 5, 2009, a suicide attack at a mosque in Upper Dir killed 42 and injured 70 persons.

On June 2, 2009, Lashkar-i-Islam imposed a fee on all Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians of approximately \$12 (1,000 rupees) per year.

On April 15, 2009, the Supreme Court granted bail to Maulana Aziz, brother of Red Mosque leader Abdul Rashid Ghazi and prayer leader at the time of the 2007 confrontation between militants and the army. Aziz was awaiting trial on 27 charges ranging from abetting terrorists to illegally occupying a building. On May 2, 2009, media reported that the Capital Development Authority (CDA) allotted 12 acres of land in Islamabad for reconstruction of the Jamia Hafsa seminary, which had been demolished during the military operation in 2007. In July 2007 the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid), in Islamabad, became the focus of a bloody confrontation between the army and militants inside the mosque. The mosque leaders and thousands of male and female students in adjacent seminaries declared imposition of Shari'a as their main aim and occupied a school library. Through a series of unlawful activities, they challenged the authority of the "un-Islamic" government and called for jihad against authorities. The militants kidnapped brothel owners, policemen, and foreign massage parlor workers and announced the set-up of Islamic courts. Fighting erupted when militants fired upon security forces attempting to cordon off the mosque, resulting in the deaths of 10 security personnel and approximately 79 militants, including the mosque's leader, Abdul Rashid Ghazi. The military operation prompted the Government to renew its efforts to curb the teaching of extremism in madrassahs across the country. The Supreme Court ordered the mosque to be reopened in October 2007 and also ordered reconstruction of the madrassah.

In April 2009 the Taliban began to extort money under the guise of a jizya tax (traditionally a tax on non-Muslims paid in exchange for government protection) in Orakzai Agency, FATA. In response to extortion and attacks, some members of the Sikh community fled the area after paying approximately \$240,000 (20 million

rupees) as jizya tax after the Taliban forcibly occupied their homes and kidnapped a Sikh leader, Kalyan Singh.

On April 22, 2009, a mob attacked a Christian locality, Tiaser Town, in Karachi, Sindh, after threatening signs were posted on the walls of a church stating that Christians should either convert or pay the jizya tax. One person, Irfan Masih, was killed and three others injured in the attack; several houses belonging to Christians, shops, and three churches were ransacked. The attacks came amid fears of growing Talibanization in Karachi, where minority groups had been subjected to violence in the past.

On April 11, 2009, militants occupied and closed to the public a shrine of Sufi saint Pir Baba in Buner, NWFP.

On March 13, 2009, the anti-terrorism court in Karachi released five Lashkar -i-Jhangvi activists, including Mohammad Atif, Mohammad Arshid, Mohammad Asif, and Zubairuddin Shahjeel, who had confessed to assassinating seven Christian staffers of the Committee for Justice and Peace in 2002, including Edwin Moon, its former director.

On March 5, 2009, militants blew up a 17th-century shrine of a Sufi saint and highly respected Pashto poet, Abdul Rahman Mohmand, commonly known as Rahman Baba, at Hazarkhwani, Peshawar, NWFP. No one was injured in the blast, but the grave and mausoleum of the Sufi saint sustained severe damage. Caretakers said they had received a warning letter from purported Taliban militants three days before the attack threatening to blow up the mausoleum if women continued to visit.

On March 2, 2009, a mob attacked a Presbyterian church in Songo, Punjab, where congregants had gathered for prayers. The attack left one woman dead and 28 persons injured.

In February 2009 an official security agency in Punjab issued a warning that terrorists planned to attack 365 religious centers and business enterprises of Ahmadis in the province.

On February 20, 2009, a suicide blast at a Shi'a funeral procession in D.I. Khan, NWFP, killed more than 31 persons and injured several others.

In December 2008 Father Sohail Patrick, a Catholic parish priest in Kohat, NWFP, received a threatening letter and telephone calls.

On October 7, 2008, local Taliban blew up the Convent Girls School in Swat, NWFP, run by (Sri Lankan) Apostolic Carmelite Sisters. According to the media, the school building was destroyed. There was no loss of life because the school and the convent had been closed and vacated a few days before.

In October 2008 St. Joseph's High School, Kohat, NWFP, received a letter from religious extremists that contained insulting remarks against Christianity. The sender also accused the school administration of "enforcing" Christianity on the Muslim students and teachers. According to the NCJP, in January 2009, the Taliban allegedly kidnapped a Hindu student at St. Joseph's High School and demanded a ransom of approximately \$247,000 (20 million rupees).

In October 2008 Mardan, NWFP, police rescued a Hindu boy, Omraj, whom the Taliban had kidnapped on August 26, 2008. The Taliban had demanded a ransom but released the boy after intervention by local influential tradesmen.

In October 2008 a suicide blast targeting the house of a Shi'a member of the National Assembly (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz), Rashid Akbar Niwani, killed 25 persons and injured 62, including Niwani, in Bhakkar, Punjab. The police linked the attack to a sectarian militant group with ties to Al Qaida and the Taliban.

In August 2008 sectarian clashes erupted between Shi'a and Sunni groups in Kurram Agency, FATA. As a result of continued clashes, nearly 700 persons reportedly died between August and November 2008, and thousands were displaced. A tribal jirga in Islamabad comprising 100 members of both sects, including parliamentarians, agreed to end the sectarian violence on September 25, 2008.

Kurram, is the only tribal agency with a significant Shi'a population, approximately 42 percent of the region's 500,000 inhabitants. Sectarian animosity in Kurram Agency has historically spilled over into sporadic clashes. In 2008, militants increasingly began to exploit these clashes to gain control over key transit points in Kurram linking Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the reporting period, including efforts to end the Sunni/Shi'a violence in Kurram Agency, FATA, through negotiations and peace talks.

The Government appointed Shahbaz Bhatti as Minister for Minorities Affairs and Jamshaid Rehmatullah, another Christian, as judge of the Lahore High Court. Minority groups viewed both actions as a positive sign.

In November 2008 Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani gave approval for the reformation of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), which had been set up in 1993 to recommend steps for ensuring effective participation of minority groups in national life and to review any anti-minority discriminatory policies or laws. He also declared August 11 as National Minority Day, to mark the day when the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, delivered his first speech to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, promising freedom of religion to all religious groups.

In May 2009 the Government approved a 5 percent quota in federal jobs for minorities. The Minorities Affairs Minister called the measure a milestone toward equality and opportunity for minorities in the country.

On May 28, 2009, the Government celebrated the first Minorities' Solidarity Day, including a convention in which the Prime Minister announced establishment of an interfaith complex to house a minorities' museum, a library of faiths, and a common place of worship.

The Government continued to celebrate 10 religious festivals of minority groups at the national level. The Baha'i community welcomed the declaration of a holiday on their religious festival, Eid-e-Rizwan.

The World Council of Religions in Islamabad, assisted by leaders from Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi communities, continued to organize interfaith dialogue sessions throughout the country. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Council of Islamic Ideology continued to organize smaller interfaith meetings and dialogue sessions. Following these meetings, Deobandi and Jamaat-e-Islami religious and political leaders significantly toned down anti-Christian and anti-Hindu rhetoric.

In January 2009 Adiala Jail became the first prison in the country to have a church on its premises. The local Christian community and an estimated 250 Christian

inmates of the prison celebrated the construction, made possible by donations from local Christians.

On April 16, 2009, two brothers accused of blasphemy were released from prison after police and Christian groups reached an out of court settlement in Narowal, Punjab.

On April 15, 2009, Sindh Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs Mohanlal Kohistani announced a grant of \$1.23 million (100 million rupees) as financial assistance for poor, disabled, and handicapped members of the Hindu community. The Sindh government announced it would give back the Hindu Gymkhana (sports arena) to the Hindu community.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Relations among religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and between Muslim sects continued. Most believed a small minority was responsible for attacks; however, discriminatory laws and the teaching of religious intolerance created a permissive environment for such attacks. Police often refused to prevent violence and harassment or refused to charge persons who committed such offenses.

Mobs occasionally attacked individuals accused of blasphemy and their families or their religious communities. When blasphemy and other religious cases were brought to court, extremists often packed the courtroom and made public threats against an acquittal. Religious extremists continued to threaten to kill those acquitted of blasphemy charges. High-profile accused persons often went into hiding or emigrated after acquittal.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of it organized by religious extremists. According to a spokesman for the Ahmadiyya community, since the promulgation of anti-Ahmadi laws in 1984, 101 Ahmadiis have been killed on religious grounds.

According to the press section of the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya, 1,033 anti-Ahmadiyya statements were printed in Urdu national newspapers in 2008, an increase of 59 from the previous year.

On March 14, 2009, unknown assailants killed two Ahmadi doctors, husband and wife, at their residence in Multan. According to reports, both showed signs of

physical abuse, and none of their belongings were taken from their home. The Ahmadiyya community claimed the killings were religiously motivated.

On October 29, 2008, a man attacked Dr. Muhammad Aslam, an Ahmadi, at his clinic in Haripur, NWFP. According to reports, the attacker stabbed the doctor four times before being apprehended. The doctor survived.

In September 2008 a former federal minister and host of a popular religious television show declared on air that killing Ahmadis was the "Islamic duty of devout Muslims;" at least two Ahmadis were killed in Sindh within 48 hours of this declaration. Dr. Abdul Mannan Siddiqui, district president of the Ahmadiyya community in Mirpur Khas, Sindh, was killed on September 8, 2008, at his hospital in Mirpur Khas. He was attending to patients when two assailants shot him. The other victim, Seth Muhammad Yousuf, district amir of the Ahmadiyya community Nawab Shah, Sindh, was killed in broad daylight in a local bazaar. Taking serious note of the killings, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP) called for urgent action to protect minorities and to stop hate-preaching in the media. At the end of the reporting period, the the government continued to stall investigation into the deaths.

In September 2008 extremist elements at Kunri, Sindh, mounted a sustained campaign of agitation and persecution against Ahmadis that resulted in angry processions and attacks on Ahmadi homes. The agitators urged police to register blasphemy cases against Ahmadis. Two Ahmadis were arrested and remained incarcerated at the end of the reporting period.

An Ahmadi pharmacist, Sheikh Saeed Ahmad, was shot and killed, reportedly by religious zealots, on September 1, 2008, in Manzoor Colony, Karachi, Sindh. He died on September 13, 2008.

On September 10, 2008, an Ahmadi, Daud Ahmad Joyia, was fired several weeks after his appointment as a lecturer at Cadet College, Kallar Kahar, Punjab, when the college administration learned of his beliefs.

In September 2008 the Tehrik-e-Khatme Nabuwwat, based in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab, issued a Ramadan calendar that devoted nearly 70 percent of the space to hate propaganda characterizing Ahmadis as infidels, cursed, and apostates.

On June 5, 2008, the principal of Punjab Medical College (PMC) expelled 15 female Ahmadi students and eight male students accused of preaching Ahmadiyyat

at the university. The same day, students at the school had gone on strike, demanding the expulsion of all Ahmadi students. The college formed a committee to resolve the case. In October 2008 the Health Department of Punjab permitted 15 of the 23 Ahmadi students to continue studies at the PMC. At the end of the reporting period they were attending the college, and the female students resided in a hostel. The Government, with approval of the Punjab Chief Minister, issued a notification for the eight other students, three male and five female, to be transferred to other colleges. No case was registered against any of the non-Ahmadi students or teachers who precipitated the strikes and riot.

In September 2008 the annual Anti-Ahmadi, Khatam-e-Nabuwwat (End of Prophethood) Conference was held in Lahore, Punjab, where clerics declared their drive against Ahmadiyyat would continue until it was eliminated from the country.

Violence against and harassment of Christians continued during the reporting period.

On April 9, 2009, the Session Court, Sargodha, ordered the arrest of a Muslim man accused of raping the daughter of one of his Christian tenants at gunpoint in a small village in Sargodha District, Punjab, on November 6, 2008.

In another case, on April 6, 2009, police arrested four of six assailants accused of attacking Christians in Cheecha Watni, Punjab, in January 2009. The perpetrators had ransacked Christian and Muslim houses in Cheecha Watni and gang-raped a 14-year-old Christian girl in front of her family. The arrests came after the victims' Muslim employer, brick kiln owner Muhammad Akram Khan, filed a lawsuit against the suspects. Khan vowed to bring to justice the two remaining suspects. Police recovered the stolen items and returned them to the Christian families.

In April 2009, at a district court in Nankana Sahib, Punjab, police cleared three men accused of raping a 13-year-old Christian girl despite eyewitness accounts and medical evidence. The girl was reportedly twice abducted and raped by Waqas Sadiq and Yousaf Sadiq with the help of Mohammad Shahbaz, and was threatened with death if she revealed the attack to authorities. Lawyers representing the victim accused the suspects' relatives of bribing police.

In May 2008, a Christian, Adeel Masih, was reportedly tortured and killed in Hafizabad by the family of a Muslim girl with whom he allegedly had a relationship. In July 2008 police arrested her father and uncle for murder, but on April 1, 2009, the Gujranwala Sessions Court cleared the suspects of all charges.

A March 2009 attack on a church and the surrounding neighborhood in Sangu-Wali, a village in Gujranwala, Punjab, left a woman dead. The attack was believed to be prompted after a Christian filed a robbery complaint against a local Muslim who, along with his friends, indiscriminately preyed on the community.

In June 2008 two sisters, ages 13 and 10, were kidnapped in Multan on their way to visit a relative. Reportedly, one of the kidnappers married the older girl and requested custody of both girls, alleging that both had willingly converted from Christianity to Islam. The older sister testified before the Lahore High Court that she was 17 years old and had converted and accepted the marriage willingly, despite her parents' assertion of her age. In September 2008 the judge decided to grant custody of the younger girl to her Christian parents and to allow the older one to make her own decision. She chose to remain with her new husband. In October 2008, the younger sister stated they had been raped and forced to convert to Islam. While traveling to and from the court in Lahore, the three lawyers who represented the family were threatened.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at temples, during the reporting period. In April 2009 *Dawn* newspaper reported that extremists attacked a Hindu religious festival, Holi, not far from the border with India, setting fire to a Hindu temple and destroying several shops. Societal violence was due in part to bias against Indians and those perceived to be of Indian origin.

The Hindu community living in Sindh Province reported they were increasingly the target of kidnappings for ransom; however, the incidence of abductions has risen exponentially throughout the country. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for abductions, particularly in Karachi, Sindh. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransom because police did little to recover kidnapping victims.

Despite recent attacks against Sikhs in the FATA, societal violence against the Sikh community remained comparatively rare.

Ismailis reported they were the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to their comparative economic well-being. Ismailis reported they frequently faced societal pressure to adopt conservative Islamic practices or risk being socially ostracized.

Anti-Semitic articles were commonly found in the vernacular press, especially tabloid newspapers, although there were no known Jewish communities in the country.

Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi'a Muslims, other Sunni sects, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews.

Discrimination in employment based on religious affiliation appeared widespread. Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists stated that the situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. Embassy officers maintained a dialogue with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and discuss the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinance, the implementation of the NAR in the NWFP, curriculum reform in public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities, and sectarian violence. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met with leaders from communities of all religious groups and non-governmental organizations working on religious freedom issues. Embassy officials also raised with parliamentarians the treatment of Ahmadis.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at \$90 million (7.27 billion rupees), the U.S. Government provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.

PALAU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles and a population of 20,000. An estimated 70 percent live in Koror State. Approximately 65 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church, 2,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 1,000; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 300; and Jehovah's Witnesses, 90. Modekngai, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 1,800 adherents. There is a primarily Catholic Filipino expatriate community of 6,800, as well as a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early nineteenth century, foreign missionaries have been active; some have been in the country for many years. The Seventh-day Adventists and the Evangelical Church have missionaries teaching in their respective elementary and high schools.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities. The Government requires religious groups to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the Government did not deny registration to any group during the reporting period. As nonprofit organizations, churches and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the Government denied these permits to any persons during the reporting period.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Government financial support for religious schools may be requested by representatives of any religion. The Government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday. Although the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, state and national events as well as graduation ceremonies are always opened with prayer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the authorities during the reporting period. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stems from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshis, following complaints from employers that workers' non-Christian religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employee families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there were no impediments to their practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

PANAMA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, with some qualifications, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 30,193 square miles and a population of 3.3 million. The Government does not collect statistics on religious affiliation, but various sources estimate that 75 to 85 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic and 15 to 25 percent as evangelical Christian. Smaller religious groups include Episcopalians who number between 7,000 and 10,000 members, Seventh-day Adventists, other Christians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with an estimated 38,000 members, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish and Muslim communities with approximately 10,000 members each, Hindus, Buddhists, and Rastafarians. Baha'is, with an estimated 4,000 members, maintain one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship. Indigenous religions include Ibeorgun (among Kuna), Mamatata and Mamachi (among Ngobe Bugle), and Embera (among Embera).

Catholics are found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also are dispersed geographically; however, 30 percent of the population in the metropolitan areas of Panama City and Colón identifies itself as evangelical Christian. Evangelical Christians are becoming more prominent in society. The mainstream Protestant denominations, which include Southern Baptist Convention and other Baptist congregations, United Methodist, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas, and Lutheran, derive their membership from the Antillean black and the expatriate communities, both of which are concentrated in Panama and Colón Provinces. The Jewish community is centered largely in

Panama City. Muslims live primarily in Panama City and Colón, with a smaller but growing presence in David and other provincial cities. The vast majority of Muslims are of Lebanese, Palestinian, or Indian descent, of whom 80 percent identify as Sunni.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that "Christian morality and public order" are respected, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Catholicism enjoys certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths. The Constitution recognizes Catholicism as "the religion of the majority" of citizens but does not designate it as the official state religion.

The Government observes Good Friday and Christmas Day as national holidays.

The Constitution grants religious associations "juridical capacity," meaning they are free to manage and administer their property within the limits prescribed by law, the same as other "juridical persons." The Ministry of Government and Justice grants "juridical personality" through a relatively simple and transparent process. Juridical personality allows a religious group to apply for all tax benefits available to nonprofit organizations. There were no reported cases of religious organizations being denied juridical personality or the associated tax benefits.

Under an immigration law that went into effect during the reporting period, most foreign religious workers are granted six-year temporary missionary worker visas that must be renewed every two years. It was unclear whether there would be extensive waiting periods under the new law. Catholic priests and nuns and Jewish rabbis are eligible for a special, automatic six-year visa.

The Constitution dictates Catholicism be taught in public schools; however, parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction. The numerical predominance of Catholicism and the consideration given to it in the Constitution generally have not prejudiced other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Constitution limits public offices that religious leaders may hold to those related to social assistance, education, and scientific research.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Christian groups, including the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Salvation Army, and Eastern Orthodox churches, participated in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the non-governmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. Committee members also participated in an interreligious committee that included Jewish Reform, Islamic, Buddhist, Baha'i, Hindu, and Ibeorgun religious groups. The committee sponsored conferences to discuss matters of religious belief and practice and participated in cultural and religious exchanges. The committee was a member of the Panamanian Civil Society Assembly, an umbrella group of civic organizations that conducts informal governmental oversight.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials also met with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an island nation with an area of 287,608 square miles and a population of 6.3 million. According to the 2000 census, 96 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian. Churches with the most members are Roman Catholic, 30 percent; Evangelical Lutheran, 20 percent; United Church, 11.5 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 10 percent; Pentecostal, 8.6 percent; Evangelical Alliance, 5.2 percent; Anglican, 3.2 percent; Baptist, 2.5 percent; and the Salvation Army, 0.2 percent. Other Christian groups, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Jehovah's Witnesses, constitute 8 percent. There are approximately 15,000 Baha'is and 2,000 Muslims. Many citizens integrate Christian faith with some indigenous beliefs and practices.

Western missionaries introduced Christianity to the country in the 19th century. Colonial governments initially assigned different missions to different geographic regions. Since territory in the country is aligned strongly with language group and ethnicity, this colonial policy led to the identification of certain churches with certain ethnic groups. However, churches of many denominations are now found throughout the country. The Muslim community has a mosque in the capital of Port Moresby and seven Islamic centers across the country.

Nontraditional Christian and non-Christian religious groups have become increasingly active in recent years. Muslim and Confucian missionaries have a

growing presence. Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups have found converts within the congregations of the more established churches.

Missionaries of many traditions operate freely. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) partnered with the Department of Education and local communities in linguistic research, literacy, Bible translation, Scripture use, and training. The Department of Education relies on SIL to produce translations of the Bible for government-sponsored religious instruction in schools. As of December 2008, SIL had translated the New Testament into 170 of the country's indigenous languages.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Constitution's provisions for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion have consistently been interpreted to mean that any religion may be practiced or propagated as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. The predominance of Christianity is recognized in the preamble of the Constitution, which refers to "our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours." However, there is no state religion.

The Department of Family and Church Affairs has a nominal policymaking role that has largely been confined to reiterating the Government's respect for church autonomy.

In general the Government does not subsidize the practice of religion. Churches continue to run most schools and many health services, and the Government provides support for these institutions. Upon independence, the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operation on a per pupil or per patient basis. The Government also pays the salaries of national teachers and health staff. The education and health infrastructures continue to rely heavily on church-run institutions. Some schools and clinics closed periodically because they did not receive promised government support; these problems were due in part to the Government's endemic financial management problems.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day as official holidays.

Immigrants and noncitizens are free to practice their religions, and foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytize and engage in other missionary activities. The Roman Catholic Church is the only traditional church that still relies to a large extent on foreign clergy.

It is the policy of the Department of Education to set aside one hour per week for religious instruction in the public schools. Representatives of Christian churches teach the lessons, and the students attend the class that is operated by the church of their parents' choice. Children whose parents do not wish them to attend the classes are excused. Members of non-Christian religious groups are not numerous, and they use family and group gatherings before and after school for religious lessons. Non-traditional Christian groups such as Seventh-day Adventists and Mormons also teach religious lessons in schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

In recent years, as new missionary movements proliferated, representatives and individuals of some established churches questioned publicly, in denominational meetings and newspaper articles, whether such activity was desirable. The courts and government practice have upheld the constitutional right to freedom of speech,

thought, and belief, however, and no legislation to curb those rights has been adopted.

In the past there were incidents of discrimination against recently arrived Muslim immigrants, but there were no reports of such incidents during the reporting period.

The Council of Churches made the only known effort at interfaith dialogue. The council members included the Anglican, Gutnius Lutheran, Union Baptist, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, United Church, and the Salvation Army. In addition, 15 parachurch organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association, participated in its activities. The ecumenical work of the Council of Churches is confined primarily to cooperation among Christian groups on social welfare projects. The Council of Churches does not include Seventh-day Adventists or Pentecostals.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and embassy officials met regularly with local religious leaders and with U.S. citizen missionaries of many denominations and agencies.

PARAGUAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 157,047 square miles and a population of 7 million. According to the 2002 national census, 89.6 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6.2 percent is evangelical Protestant. Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform), members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Buddhists, adherents of the Unification Church, and members of the Baha'i Faith also are present.

Native-born citizens tend to be Catholic, while immigrants generally belong to other religious groups. The department of Alto Parana has a large Muslim community due to substantial immigration from the Middle East, particularly Lebanon. Mennonite communities flourish in the departments of Boquerón and San Pedro. Members of other religious groups are concentrated in the largest cities, including Asunción, Ciudad del Este, and Encarnación.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution and other laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion and impose few legal

restrictions on religious expression or speech. The Constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and freely practice their religion; provide legal protections covering discrimination and persecution; and offer remedies for the violation of religious freedom.

The Constitution recognizes the historical role of the Catholic Church. Although the Government is secular in name and practice, most government officials are Catholic, and Catholic clergy occasionally speak during official government events. The Government permits political parties to form based on a particular faith. The Constitution requires the president, vice president, and members of Congress to be laypersons. In July 2008 the Pope formally affirmed the 2006 resignation of Fernando Lugo Mendez as a bishop in the Catholic Church. In August 2008 Lugo was sworn in as the democratically elected president.

The Government observes Maundy (Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Virgin of Caacupe Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Constitution provides for conscientious objection to military service. The armed forces have an extensive Catholic chaplain program supported by the Government. The Catholic Church considers this chaplaincy to be a diocese and appoints a bishop to oversee the program on a full-time basis.

Although the Government does not place restrictions on religious publishing or other religious media, such publications are subject to libel law.

The Government requires all churches and religious organizations to register with the Ministry of Education and Culture's Vice Ministry of Worship. Registration includes completing required paperwork, obtaining certification as a nonprofit organization, passing financial and criminal background checks, and recertifying annually. Although the Government imposes few controls on religious groups, many remained unregistered, typically evangelical churches with few members. While the registration process requires applicants to visit the Ministry in Asunción, in 2008 the Ministry began developing an online registration system for religious organizations and missionaries.

The Government does not place restrictions on foreign missionaries. After President Lugo took office in August 2008, the Vice Ministry of Worship eliminated registration fees for religious organizations. Nevertheless, the immigration process by which foreigners, including missionaries, obtain temporary

or permanent residency remains opaque and requires applicants to pay fees in excess of \$100 (400,000 guaraníes) per transaction and spend months or even years to obtain residency.

The Government permits but does not require religious instruction in public schools. The Government permits parents to homeschool or send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In April 2009 leaders of the Unification Church reported continuing difficulties related to the expropriation of land in Puerto Casado by the Government in 2005. The Church claimed that the Government failed to evict local farmers illegally residing on its property after the Church donated adjacent land to local farmers in 2007.

Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to give permission for blood transfusions alleged that authorities challenged their "right to bodily self-determination." In 2008 the Government enacted a law allowing doctors to administer blood transfusions in life-threatening situations without patient consent. Based on this new law, between January and March 2009 doctors at the National Hospital in Itaugua gave newborn Sebastian Viveros several blood transfusions without the consent of his parents. Jehovah's Witnesses José Ortega and Asunción Bernarda Ortega Gaona, arrested in 2007 for refusing to allow doctors to give their daughter blood transfusions, remained under investigation at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government generally took steps to promote respect for religious groups. On March 11-12, 2009, the Government hosted the MERCOSUR Interfaith Dialogue. President Lugo addressed the group and strongly supported the event.

In November 2008 the Government launched the "Everyone for Values" project at the inaugural Interfaith Dialogue Roundtable meeting in Asunción. The Government and representatives from 58 religious organizations signed a joint declaration in support of the "fundamental national pillars of life, education, family, and the elderly." In the spirit of this declaration, the Government designated 2009 as the "Year of the Dignified Life" and launched a public awareness campaign with support from these religious organizations and local media. The Government also hosted subsequent Interfaith Dialogue Roundtable meetings on March 6 and May 27, 2009, which were attended by representatives from 58 religious organizations.

In 2009 the Government peaceably removed illegal settlements on properties owned by the Anglican and Baptist churches.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi messages and symbols, including graffiti, appeared sporadically. In November 2008 the Vice President and President of the Senate attended the Night of Broken Glass (Kristelnacht) Memorial Event in Asunción to honor Jews who died in 1938 during Kristelnacht.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met with representatives of different religious groups.

PERU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 496,225 square miles and a population of 29.5 million. Among the major religious groups are Roman Catholics, evangelicals and traditional Protestant denominations (including Baptist, Anglican, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-day Adventists), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and Muslims. There also are indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a local religious group, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, which is unrelated to Israel or Judaism.

The 2007 National Census conducted by the National Statistics Institute found that 81.3 percent of the population is Catholic; 12.5 percent Protestant (mainly evangelical); and 3.3 percent includes Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact.

In the last 20 years, according to some estimates, Protestant (mostly evangelical) representation in the population grew from approximately 2 percent to 12.5 percent; however, the National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimates that evangelicals represent at least 15 percent of the population. Historically, they resided in smaller communities outside of Lima and in rural areas; in the last 15 years their presence in urban areas increased significantly. There are small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim communities in Lima (mainly of

Palestinian origin) and Tacna (mainly of Pakistani origin). The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact organized the group in 1960 in Junín Department, but since his death in 2000 the membership has sharply declined; most adherents are concentrated in and near Lima. Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions, especially in the Andean highlands. Some indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Article 50 of the Constitution establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The Government acts independently of Catholic Church policy; however, it has a close relationship with the Church, and an agreement signed with the Vatican in 1980 maintains the special status of the Catholic Church. Critics complained that the agreement was unconstitutional since it was signed with a military government instead of democratic representatives. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high-profile public role.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion, but the Catholic Church receives preferential treatment in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas, in accordance with the 1980 agreement. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons receive remuneration from the State in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Church. This applies to the 50 active bishops, as well as to some priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the borders, representing approximately one eighth of the clergy and pastoral agents. In addition, the Government provides each diocese with a monthly institutional subsidy.

The executive branch formally interacts with religious communities on matters of religious freedom through the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry implements laws and interacts with the public through the Office of Catholic Affairs and through the Office of Interconfessional Affairs, which deals with non-Catholic groups. Both offices maintain a continuing dialogue on religious freedom with the Catholic Church and other organized religious groups.

A special registry of non-Catholic religious groups allows non-Catholic churches to receive state benefits similar to those received by the Catholic Church; however, some evangelical church leaders complained about the requirement to operate for seven years before being added to the registry. In addition, many evangelical churches lack central lines of authority and doctrinal unity, which complicates the process of registration; more hierarchical, established church groups supported strict registration requirements. There were 115 religious groups and nine religious missionary entities registered at the end of the reporting period.

As a result of negotiations between the Ministry of Justice and an interfaith working group of non-Catholic religious groups, regulations permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), to advise on registration of churches. The registration does not recognize churches officially but identifies those religious groups with authority to exercise their rights before government agencies and society in general. The interfaith working group continued to advocate for a law to promote further religious freedom and equality. On June 11, 2009, thousands of evangelicals and supporters marched to Congress to draw attention to draft law 1008/2006 - CR Law on Religious Freedom and Equality. The draft law was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely; however, they do not receive the same privileges as the Catholic Church with respect to customs, immigration, and taxation. All religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize.

The law mandates that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Catholicism is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic religious or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry mandated that the presiding Catholic bishop of an area approve religious education teachers in all public schools. Parents may request that the principal exempt their children from mandatory public school religion classes.

In 2008 religious groups and the Ministry of Justice continued to work together to change residency documents that differentiated "religious" status between "Catholic" and "non-Catholic"; the process continues, and some documents have been changed to "religious" with no reference to a specific religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Ministry of Justice officials stated that the Government pays stipends to the Catholic cardinal, six archbishops, and other Catholic Church officials. According to the Office of Catholic Affairs, the Government gives the Catholic Church approximately \$867,700 (PEN 2,603,000) annually. Catholic and non-Catholic charities do not pay customs duties; however, non-Catholic groups with extensive charitable activities complained that goods donated from abroad continued to be taxed at commercial rates. Some non-Catholic missionary groups claimed that the law discriminated against them by taxing their imported religious materials, including Bibles, whereas the Catholic Church was not taxed. Catholics and non-Catholics are subject to equal taxation in most activities. All are exempt from paying taxes on places of worship. Buildings, houses, and other real estate owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) may pay property taxes on schools and clergy residences. Catholic religious workers are exempt from taxes on international travel. The Freedom of Conscience Institute, a non-governmental organization (NGO), favors strict separation of church and state and opposes preferential treatment for any religious group.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents were exempt from attending Catholic instruction, students who did so lost academic credits. Students who graduated from primary and secondary schools without these credits could not be at the top of their class, regardless of other academic achievement, and were thus disadvantaged in competition for scholarships and for admission to universities.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains. A government decree that created 40 Catholic military positions obliges members of the armed forces and the police, as well as relatives and civilian coworkers, to participate in Catholic services. There were no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. Some non-Catholic soldiers, however, complained that it was difficult to find and attend Protestant religious services because of the lack of chaplains.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2007 the remains of evangelical pastor Jorge Parraga Castillo, who disappeared in 1989, were found at the Manta military base. Witnesses claimed that the military tortured and killed Parraga and then burned his body. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office stated that the death of Parraga was not related to his work as a pastor. At the end of the reporting period, no one had been charged in the killing, and the investigation by the Public Ministry continued with little progress.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In 2008 the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office identified three cases referring to the exemption of non-Catholic students from required religion courses, Catholic baptismal requirements for school enrollment, accommodation of religious days of rest for higher education students, and exemption from military service based on religious belief.

Religious groups occasionally joined forces on ecumenical projects on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborated closely in the area of human rights. The Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS), a Catholic NGO, and the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association--an evangelical NGO--conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason. Major political figures promoted religious freedom in public affairs, and non-Catholic politicians held high profile positions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy staff met with leaders of

numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, Protestant groups, and the Muslim and Jewish communities. The Embassy also continued regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including Caritas, CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, CONEP, UNICEP, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

PHILIPPINES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The armed insurgent Muslim group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued to seek greater autonomy. Peace talks between the Government and the MILF were suspended in August 2008 after rogue elements of the MILF launched a series of attacks in several areas of Mindanao following a Supreme Court order preventing the Government from signing a territorial agreement with the MILF, an agreement that was later ruled unconstitutional. A reconstituted government peace panel was working to resume peace talks with the MILF at the end of the reporting period.

There was some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against members of the Muslim minority by members of the Christian majority. This, combined with economic disparities, contributed to persistent conflict in certain provinces in the southern Philippines.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy actively encouraged the peace process between the Government and MILF and maintained active outreach with religious leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to engage them in interfaith activities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 115,831 square miles and a population of 97.98 million.

According to the National Statistics Office, approximately 93 percent of the population is Christian. Roman Catholics, the largest religious group, comprise 80 to 85 percent of the total population.

Islam is the largest minority religion and Muslims constitute between 5 and 9 percent of the total population. Most Muslims are members of various ethnic minority groups, commonly referred to as Moros. They reside principally on Mindanao and nearby islands. Although most belong to the Sunni branch of Islam,

a small number of Shi'a Muslims live in the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur in Mindanao.

Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Seventh-day Adventists, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Assemblies of God, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Philippine (Southern) Baptists. Domestically established denominations include the Philippine Independent Church (Aglipay), the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ), and the Members Church of God International.

Christianity is the majority religion among indigenous peoples. Between 12 million and 16 million indigenous persons adhere to Catholicism or Protestantism, often incorporating elements of traditional indigenous belief systems.

Conversion from Christianity to Islam is most typical among overseas Filipinos who have lived and worked in Islamic countries, largely because conversion brings social and economic benefits while abroad. Many of these "converts of convenience" remain Muslim upon their return to the country and are known collectively as "Balik Islam" (return to Islam).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for the separation of church and state.

The law requires organized religions to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission and with the Bureau of Internal Revenue to establish tax-exempt status. There is no penalty for failing to register, and some groups do not. There were no reports of discrimination in the registration system during the reporting period.

The Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) generally limits its activities to supporting Islamic religious practices, although it also has the authority to coordinate economic growth and livelihood projects in predominantly Muslim areas. The

OMA's Bureau of Pilgrimage and Endowment helps coordinate the annual Muslim pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, supervises endowment (auqaf) of properties and institutions, and conducts activities for the establishment and maintenance of Islamic centers and other projects. The presidential assistant for Muslim affairs helps coordinate relations with countries that have large Islamic populations and that have contributed to Mindanao's economic development and the peace process.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools with the written consent of parents, provided there is no cost to the Government. Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools give religious groups the opportunity to teach moral values during school hours. Attendance is not mandatory, and the various groups share classroom space. The Government also allows interested groups to distribute religious literature in public schools. By law, public schools must ensure that the religious rights of students are protected. Muslim students are allowed to wear their head coverings (hijab), and Muslim girls are not required to wear shorts during physical education classes. In many parts of Mindanao, Muslim students routinely attended Catholic schools from elementary to university level; however, these students were not required to receive religious instruction.

Approximately 14 percent of the Mindanao student population attended Islamic schools (madaris). Government officials estimated the number of Islamic schools at 2,000. Of these, more than half were located in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). A total of 633 madaris were registered with the OMA, while 38 were registered with the Department of Education. Registration with the OMA or the Department of Education is optional for madaris but, if pursued, can lead to financial assistance from the Government. Most madaris did not meet the Department's accreditation standards. The Department of Education manages financial assistance to the madaris system from local and international sources.

The Government continued to implement its unified curriculum, designed to integrate madaris into the national education system. In addition to the 38 madaris registered with Department of Education, 37 additional madaris in Mindanao were in the process of obtaining operation permits from the Department of Education at the end of the reporting period. The Department of Education ordered public elementary schools that had at least 25 Muslim students to begin offering Arabic language instruction and classes on Islamic values. During the 2008-09 school year the Department of Education provided Arabic language instruction and

Islamic values education, including textbooks on these subjects, to Muslim students in 754 public elementary schools.

The Government's National Ecumenical Consultative Committee (NECCOM) fosters interfaith dialogue among major religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, Muslim groups, Iglesia ni Cristo, Aglipayan, and Protestant denominations. Smaller Protestant denominations are represented in the NECCOM through the National Council of Churches of the Philippines and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, two large networks of Protestant churches and mission groups. NECCOM members meet periodically with the President to discuss social and political issues.

The Government observes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints' Day, Christmas Day, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country. The Government does not ban or discourage specific religious groups or religious factions. However, Muslims, who are concentrated in some of the most impoverished provinces, complained that the Government had not made sufficient efforts to promote their economic development. Some Muslim religious leaders asserted that Muslims suffered from economic discrimination.

The Code of Muslim Personal Laws recognizes Islamic law (Shari'a) as part of national law; however, it does not apply in criminal matters, and it applies only to Muslims. Some Muslim community leaders (ulama) argued that the Government should allow Islamic courts to extend their jurisdiction to criminal law cases, and some supported the MILF's goal of forming an autonomous region governed in accordance with Islamic law. As in other parts of the judicial system, the Shari'a courts suffered from a large number of unfilled positions. All five Shari'a district court judgeships and 36 percent of circuit court judgeships remained vacant. Aside from budget restrictions, judicial positions on the Shari'a courts were particularly difficult to fill because applicants must be members of both the Shari'a Bar and the Integrated Bar of the Philippines.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

The Government attributed several attacks to MILF separatist rebels who continued to seek political autonomy in Mindanao during the reporting period. In August 2008, after the Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order on the signing of a Government-MILF territorial agreement, an agreement later declared unconstitutional, MILF attacks and subsequent clashes with government troops resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Christian and Muslim residents and the internal displacement in central Mindanao of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

During the reporting period, the Government also attributed a series of attacks and killings to the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), other Islamic militants, and the New People's Army (NPA).

On April 10 and April 11, 2009, alleged members of the ASG killed farmers Cosme Aballe and Emilio Clemente in Zamboanga City. The ASG claimed Clemente and Aballe were members of the Ilaga, a Christian vigilante group that allegedly attacked Muslim rebels in Basilan and other parts of the ARMM.

On July 1, 2008, the military found the body of Josefino Estaniel, a Protestant pastor in the village of Dalagdag near Davao city, who was kidnapped in May 2008. The Government claimed that Pastor Estaniel was tortured and killed by communist guerillas for cooperating with the military.

In July 2008 Catholic Bishop Martin Jumoad of Isabela, Basilan and other Catholics reportedly received letters from self-described 'Muslim warriors' possibly linked to the ASG, threatening harm if the Catholics did not convert to Islam or pay "Islamic taxes."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government promoted interfaith dialogue to build mutual trust and respect among various religious and cultural groups. The Council on Interfaith Initiatives continued to strengthen the Government's existing institutional arrangements for interfaith activities by coordinating interfaith programs and initiatives with all government agencies, local government units, and nongovernmental organization

(NGO) partners. The Council receives, approves, and prioritizes programs and project proposals designed to achieve peace and development through interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Historically, Muslims have been alienated socially from the Christian majority, and some ethnic and cultural discrimination against Muslims have been recorded. Young Muslim professionals reported that some employers stereotyped Muslims as being less educated. Some Muslims reported that they had difficulty renting rooms in boarding houses or being hired for retail work if they used their real names or wore distinctive Muslim dress. Therefore, many resorted to adopting Christian pseudonyms and wearing Western clothing.

Over the past 60 years, efforts by the dominant Christian population to resettle in traditionally Muslim areas such as Mindanao have fostered resentment among many Muslim residents. Many Muslims viewed Christian proselytizing as another form of resettlement, with the intention of depriving Muslims of their homeland and cultural identity, including their religion.

Despite this, amicable ties among religious communities are common, and many participate in interdenominational efforts to alleviate poverty. The Peacemakers' Circle Foundation, a loose coalition of various religious and faith-based groups, continued to focus on building and strengthening interfaith relations through dialogues between Muslims and Christians in selected communities. The Bishops-Ulama Conference in Mindanao continued to bring together Catholic bishops and members of the Ulama League of the Philippines from Mindanao and hold dialogues on addressing local issues of peace and order and intercultural solidarity. Other interfaith groups also promoted peace between persons of different faiths. Leadership of human rights groups, trade union confederations, and industry associations typically represents many religious persuasions.

On April 6, 2009, members of the local Muslim tribe Yakan allegedly attacked a Christian community in Lantawan town in Basilan, killing three Catholics and injuring several others. Basilan's local bishop condemned the attack, noting that it took place during the Christian's observance of Holy Week, and appealed to local authorities to secure and protect the Christian community in Lantawan. The motivation for the attack was unclear.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of all major religious groups to discuss these problems and concerns. In addition, the U.S. Government actively supported the Government's peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation.

The Embassy also maintained active outreach with NGOs. The Embassy hosted meetings of political and opinion leaders from the Muslim community to discuss the U.S. role in Mindanao. The Embassy continued to conduct a wide range of programming to promote interfaith dialogue and peace and to highlight these issues with populations in and around Manila, as well as across Mindanao. In August 2008 the Embassy hosted the visit of an American imam who reached out to Christian and Muslim community leaders and clergy to discuss the importance of interfaith dialogue and tolerance among religions. A digital video conference in February 2009 linked Muslim leaders in the Manila area with the King Center in Atlanta to discuss the promotion of tolerance.

For fiscal year 2008, 60 percent of the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) \$91 million budget for the country went to programs in Mindanao, mostly in the ARMM. USAID programs were instrumental in supporting the peace process and helped foster an environment for greater religious tolerance. During the reporting period, USAID supported the development of an Islamic-based conflict resolution trainer's manual, which features Islamic teachings on peace and conflict resolution. Some 450 peace advocates, mostly Muslims and Christians from conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, were trained to use the manual. USAID's Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Program helped more than 28,000 former Moro National Liberation Front members make the transition from fighting to productive farming. Other USAID-funded programs focused on helping Muslim students and recent university graduates in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao acquire some of the vital skills necessary to compete successfully for stable and lucrative employment in high growth sectors of the economy. USAID also implemented an internship program for young Muslim students and potential leaders in the largely Christian-dominated House of Representatives. This program helped policy makers develop a more intimate understanding of Mindanao's Muslim cultures, while simultaneously fostering an appreciation among the interns for the policy making and legislative processes.

The Embassy also sought to help community leaders broaden their cultural understanding through the Mission's exchange programs. During the reporting period, the Embassy sent Department of Education officials and madaris' principals to the United States on Voluntary Visitor and International Visitor Programs. The Embassy used two student exchange programs, the Youth Leadership Program and the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program, to enable Muslim students to study in the United States and learn about religious tolerance and pluralism from the perspective of American youth. During the 2008-09 academic year, the YES Program sponsored 40 secondary students from the ARMM to spend the academic year living with American families. In April 2009, through the Youth Leadership Program, 23 Muslim, Christian, and Lumad (indigenous) students attended a four-week student exchange program with an American university. Two Citizens Exchange Programs sent 18 Muslim leaders to the United States for one month to meet with Americans engaged in interfaith dialogue and also brought Americans to Mindanao. An embassy official delivered a speech and organized a digital video conference on Islam in the United States and its annual Ramadan observances, while American Corners throughout the Philippines featured educational displays titled "Islam in America." The Embassy organized two children's summer camps in Mindanao for Muslims, Christians, and Lumads with a theme of community service and diversity, and the Ambassador also hosted 40 at-risk children from a Muslim community at a basketball game in Manila.

The Embassy's Public Affairs Section, with increased staffing to handle expanded outreach programming for Mindanao, funded several programs for teachers or young persons. In December 2008, 34 teachers whose schools had been affected by fighting in Cotabato attended a seminar on English teaching. In April and May 2009, the Public Affairs Section provided a Regional English Language Officer from the United States at summer camps for approximately 300 teachers throughout Mindanao. In April 2009 the Embassy launched a Mindanao-based chapter on its website to highlight its Mindanao programming to promote tolerance and peace.

POLAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom, and the generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Anti-Semitic sentiment persisted among some elements of society and within marginal political parties; however, the Government publicly denounced anti-Semitic acts. There were occasional desecrations of Jewish and Roman Catholic cemeteries.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy and consulate general officials actively monitored threats to religious freedom and sought further resolution of unsettled legacies of the Holocaust and the communist era.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 120,725 square miles and a population of 38 million.

More than 94 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. According to the 2008 Annual Statistical Yearbook of Poland, the formal membership of the listed religious groups includes: 33,699,264 Roman Catholics, 504,150 Polish Orthodox Church members, 53,000 Greek Catholics, 128,235 Jehovah's Witnesses, 77,500 Lutherans (Augsburg Confession), 23,568 Old Catholic Mariavits, 21,303 Pentecostals, 9,595 Seventh-day Adventists, 18,804 members of the Polish Catholic Church, 4,853 members of the New Apostolic Church, 4,818 Baptists, 4,481 Methodists, 3,510 Lutherans (Reformed), 3,389 registered members of Jewish associations, 2,425 members of the Church of Christ, 2,153 Catholic Mariavits, 1,275 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 915 members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas), and 112 registered members of Muslim associations. These

figures do not account for persons who adhere to a particular faith but do not maintain formal membership. Figures for Jews and Muslims in particular are significantly deflated as a result. Jewish and Muslim organizations estimate their actual numbers to be 30,000-40,000 and 25,000, respectively.

The majority of asylum seekers are Muslims from Chechnya. In the refugee centers around the country, they organize their own mosques where they practice their religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Citizens are guaranteed the freedom to practice any faith they choose. Religious groups may organize, select and train personnel, solicit and receive contributions, publish, and meet without government interference. There are no governmental restrictions on establishing and maintaining places of worship.

The Criminal Code stipulates that offending religious sentiment through public speech is punishable by a fine or up to a three-year prison term.

Citizens have the right to sue the Government for constitutional violations of religious freedom, and legal protections cover discrimination or persecution of religious freedom.

There are 15 religious groups whose relationship with the state is governed by specific legislation that outlines the internal structure of the religious groups, their activities, and procedures for property restitution. There are 149 other registered religious groups that do not have a statutorily defined relationship with the state. All registered religious groups, including the original 15, enjoy equal protection under the law.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Corpus Christi Day, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day.

Religious communities may register with the Ministry of the Interior; however, they are not required to do so and may function freely without registration. The 1989 Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief requires that in order to register a group must submit the names of at least 100 members as well as other information. Information on membership must be confirmed by a notary public, although the registration itself often appears to be a formality. All registered religious groups receive the same privileges, such as duty-free importation of office equipment and reduced taxes. During the reporting period, two new religious groups registered: Hindu Bhavan Religious Union and Sardza Ling Institute.

The law places Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, and Protestant communities on the same legal footing, and the Government attempts to address the problems that minority religious groups may face.

Foreign missionaries and religious organizations are not required to register in the country and may operate freely without registration. Foreign missionaries are subject only to the standard rules applicable to foreigners. There were no reports that missionaries were denied entry. If an organization (Polish or foreign) chooses to register, it is then asked to follow the requirements for registering a religious organization listed in the 1989 Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief.

The Constitution gives parents the right to raise their children in accordance with their own religious and philosophical beliefs. Religious education classes are taught in the public schools. In theory, children have a choice between religious instruction and ethics. Although Catholic Church representatives teach the vast majority of these religious classes, parents may request classes taught by representatives from any of the legally registered religious groups to fulfill the religious education requirement; however, there were reports that accommodation for the needs of religious minorities was a problem. While not common, the Ministry of Education pays for non-Catholic religious instruction in some circumstances, such as Polish Orthodox classes in eastern Poland. Religious education instructors, including clergy, receive salaries from the state for teaching religion in public schools. Catholic Church representatives are included on a commission that determines which books qualify for school use.

The Government does not require the designation of religion on passports or national identity documents.

In accordance with the 1998 Concordat, the Government and the Catholic Church participate at the highest levels in a Joint Government-Episcopate Task Force, which meets regularly to discuss church-state relations.

The Government cooperates with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and officials of major denominations to promote religious tolerance and provides support to activities such as the March of the Living, an event to honor victims of the Holocaust. In 2008 and 2009 the President hosted several events in honor of citizens who risked their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust. On April 21-23, 2009, high-ranking representatives of the President and the Government, along with five citizens who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, participated in Holocaust Memorial Days ceremonies in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Representatives of the President and the Government participated in ceremonies commemorating the 66th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The President and the Government also supported efforts to build a Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Construction began in June 2009.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

According to the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR), there are challenges in organizing ethics classes for students who do not attend religion classes in Polish schools. In September 2007 the HFHR presented its written comments at the request of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which was reviewing the complaint of a family who claimed that the Government violated Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion), Article 13 (right to an effective remedy), and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as well as Article 2 of Protocol Number 1 to the Convention (right to education). The complaint was submitted to the ECHR in 2002, but the case was still pending at the end of the reporting period. According to the HFHR, the dispute lies in a specific regulation, which requires a minimum of seven students to organize religion or ethics classes. This requirement results in indirect discrimination against students belonging to minorities, including those who choose ethics lessons instead of religious classes.

Although the Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, crucifixes hang in both the upper and lower houses of Parliament, as well as in many other public buildings, including public schools.

Public radio and television stations broadcast Catholic Mass under licenses granted by the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Council.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to work with both local and international religious groups to address property claims and other sensitive issues stemming from Nazi- and communist-era confiscations and persecutions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is largely responsible for coordinating relations between the Government and international organizations, although the President and Prime Minister also play an important role. The Government cooperates effectively with a variety of international organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, for the preservation of historic sites, including cemeteries and houses of worship. However, contentious issues regarding property restitution and preservation of historic religious sites and cemeteries remained only partially settled.

Progress continued in implementing the laws enacted in the 1990s providing for the restitution to religious communities of property owned prior to World War II that subsequently was nationalized. Five commissions--one each for the Catholic Church, Jewish community, Lutheran Church, and Orthodox Church, and one for other denominations--supervised by the Interior Minister oversee religious property claims. Of approximately 10,000 communal property claims, more than 5,200 had been resolved and more than 1,200 properties had been returned by the fall of 2008.

The last of these laws was enacted in 1997 and provided for the Jewish community to submit property claims. The law provided a five-year period, the longest period allowed for any religious group, to file claims for synagogues, cemeteries, and community centers as well as buildings that were used for other religious, educational, or charitable activities. The Jewish community submitted 5,544 claims by the May 2002 filing deadline. As of September 29, 2008, the commission either partially or entirely concluded 1,450 cases. Of that number 389 were settled amicably, 259 claims were either partially or entirely accepted, 474 ended in a decision to discontinue proceedings, 213 claims were rejected, and in 42 cases the judgment had not been agreed upon.

As of August 31, 2008, 2,794 of the 3,063 claims filed by the Catholic Church had been concluded, with 1,463 claims settled between the Church and the party in possession of the property, usually the national or local government.

The Lutheran Church, for which the filing deadline was 1996, filed claims for 1,200 properties. As of July 31, 2008, 890 cases were concluded, of which 239 were resolved by a settlement between the parties; 159 ended in judgments; and 492 claims ended in the decision to discontinue or to reject the application.

As of September 16, 2008, the Orthodox Church filed 472 claims, of which 274 were closed in full or in part.

The property commission for all other denominations received a total of 168 claims. As of September 11, 2008, the commission concluded 62 cases, which included 11 judgments on transfer of property or compensation, two settlements for property and financial compensation, 32 discontinued claims, and six dismissed claims. An agreement had not been reached in 11 cases.

The laws on communal property restitution do not address the issue of communal properties to which private third parties had title, leaving several controversial and complicated cases unresolved. In a number of cases, buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries destroyed during or after World War II.

There is no comprehensive law on returning or compensating for privately-held real property confiscated during these eras. In 2008 the Government continued to develop legislation to provide administrative mechanisms for the restitution of private property in addition to existing judicial mechanisms. This draft legislation was never sent to the Parliament (Sejm) for action but remained in interministerial

channels. Since the 1990s, Parliament has made several attempts to enact such legislation. While some restitution claimants have regained title to their property through court action, the lack of legislation precluded simpler recourse through administrative channels; this affected individuals of many religious groups seeking restitution or compensation for property confiscated during and after World War II.

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany held its annual meeting in Warsaw in January 2009 and pressed for urgent passage of a private property restitution law with more lenient filing requirements. In February 2009 the Prime Minister's Plenipotentiary for International Dialogue, Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, sent a letter to Claims Conference representatives in which he expressed support for comprehensive, just, and fair legislation, citing the Government's "moral responsibility to rectify the wrongs caused by nationalization" of private property by the Nazis and the communist regime. Bartoszewski and other government representatives made similar statements at the multilateral Conference on Holocaust Era Assets in Prague in June 2009.

Representatives of the President and the Government routinely sponsored and participated in events to promote religious tolerance, including academic conferences, dedications of religious monuments, restorations of Jewish cemeteries, cultural events, museum exhibits, and film festivals in major cities. On June 24, 2009, high-ranking government officials attended the opening in Torun of the College of Hebraic Studies, which is run by a Franciscan order. The College, which was expected to enroll its first class in October 2009, was established by Father Marek Tandek to promote the study of Jewish religion, culture, and history.

On March 5, 2009, the Polish Ministry of Education and the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) launched a set of teaching tools to combat anti-Semitism. The materials are specifically aimed at middle-school age (gymnazium) students with the intent of correcting stereotypes and prejudices at an earlier age. The material was endorsed at the launch by Minister Bartoszewski--an Auschwitz survivor--and the Deputy Minister of Education, Krzysztof Stanowski.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. For example, in January 2009 government and

Roman Catholic Church officials took part in the Church's Annual Days of Judaism, intended to promote interfaith dialogue.

Isolated incidents of harassment and violence against Jews continued to occur, almost always linked to skinheads or other marginal societal groups. The All-Polish Youth (MW), National Rebirth of Poland (NOP), the Polish National Party (PPN), and several other organizations were known to espouse anti-Semitic views, but there was no evidence directly linking these groups to incidents of violence.

On January 31, 2009, Professor Bogulsaw Wolniewicz stated on the Radio Maryja Catholic radio station that "he cannot tolerate any longer the brazen promotion of Jewish culture and Jewish point of view in Poland which has been going on for at least the last decade." On February 27, the Government's Media Ethics Council stated that Radio Maryja authorities, by allowing these types of anti-Semitic comments without any commentary, violated the basic ethical norms and laws of the country and appealed to Radio Maryja to undertake all necessary measures to prevent the broadcast of any anti-Semitic comments in the future. In February the Polish NGO Open Republic brought the case to the attention of government prosecutors.

On January 30, 2009, the District Court in Bialystok sentenced three persons to 12-20 months' imprisonment for promoting fascism and racial-based hatred for writing swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on the walls of Bialystok's ghetto and Jewish cemetery in 2007.

In February 2008 the head of the extreme-right PNN, Leszek Bubel, posted a four-minute video on the YouTube Internet site in which he boasted about his anti-Semitism and urged Jews to leave the country. During the reporting period, several criminal and civil cases against Bubel for inciting hatred and disseminating anti-Semitic literature were either resolved or continued in courts in Bialystok, Lublin, Wrzenia, and Warsaw. Bubel previously served six months in jail for inciting racial hostility and defaming Jews.

In November 2008 a Torun court, citing the lack of sufficient evidence, upheld prosecutors' June 2008 decision not to charge the prominent Polish priest, Tadeusz Rydzyk, with offending religious sentiment through public speech. In July 2007 the weekly news magazine *Wprost* released an audiotape, allegedly a recording of Rydzyk, making anti-Semitic comments during a lecture in Torun and claiming that President Kaczynski "is in the pockets of the Jewish lobby." Rydzyk suggested that the tape had been tampered with. President Kaczynski denounced

the remarks. In June 2008 prosecutors formally decided not to charge Rydzyk after interviewing witnesses; in July 2008 the Union of Jewish Communities appealed the prosecutors' decision not to charge Rydzyk.

In May 2007 prosecutors filed hate-crime charges with a Wroclaw court against Polish administrators of Red Watch, a website maintained by the anti-Semitic Blood and Honor group. The cases were still pending during the reporting period. The charges, which are punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, stem from the 2006 arrest of the administrators for allegedly posting the description of a journalist as including promoting a totalitarian state and inciting racial and national hatred. In 2006 police arrested the administrators of Red Watch, who allegedly posted information about a journalist described as "an enemy of white people." The journalist was later stabbed in Warsaw by skinheads. In March 2008 a court in Leszno sentenced a skinhead to 10 years' imprisonment for the stabbing of the journalist.

On October 20, 2008, a family court reprimanded four teenagers who jeered at and attacked an Orthodox Jew visiting a Jewish cemetery in May in Warka. The youths, ages 13-16, insulted, punched, and kicked the victim. The teenagers were charged with causing bodily harm and insulting a person's nationality, which are criminal offences that can be punished by up to three years' imprisonment.

Occasional cases of cemetery desecration, including of both Jewish and Catholic sites, occurred during the reporting period, primarily by rebellious youth. For example, on April 29, 2009, six tombstones were damaged in the Jewish cemetery in Kalisz and on July 24, 2008, a group of young persons set up a campfire in the same cemetery and broke down a couple of tombstones and a monument. On March 17, 2009, unidentified vandals damaged more than 50 tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Chrzanow. In August 2008 vandals damaged 41 new tombstones at the Jewish cemetery in Wroclaw. In these types of cases, the police opened investigations to find the perpetrators.

On February 17, 2009, police arrested four drunken high school students who damaged some headstones and crosses in a Catholic cemetery in Wesola. The two 17-year-old students pled guilty and were sentenced to three months of voluntary service; the cases against the 16-year-old students were pending a hearing before a court for juvenile offenders.

In July 2008 two young persons damaged tombstones in the recently restored Jewish cemetery in Losice. The two vandals were caught, pled guilty, and were

sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment (suspended for three years) and a fine of approximately \$270 (800 PLN). They were accompanied by a man who was abusive towards police officers; he was fined and sentenced to one year's imprisonment (suspended for three years). The vandals were also required to cover the costs of tombstone restorations.

Interfaith groups worked to bring together the various religious groups in the country. The Polish Council of Christians and Jews met regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest, and the Catholic and Orthodox churches had an active bilateral commission. The Polish Ecumenical Council, a group that includes most religious groups other than the Roman Catholic Church, was also active. Approximately 250 Greek Catholic churches were taken over by Roman Catholic dioceses after World War II, and Greek Catholics worked to have those properties returned. This was an internal issue between the Greek and Roman Catholic dioceses, mediated by the Pope, which did not involve the Government.

There were several conferences devoted to religion and religious tolerance. For example, on May 15, 2009, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw hosted a scientific conference on "Sociology of Religious Life: Research Traditions and Cultural Changes." On April 18, 2009, approximately 90 press, radio, and television journalists from all over the country participated in the workshop "Church without Secrets" held in Lichen (Saint Mary's Shrine). On October 3-4, 2008, the Copernicus Center of Jagiellonian University and the Philosophy Department of the Papal Theology University held a two-day conference entitled "Will Science Replace Religion?"

The March of the Living is an annual international education program that takes place in the country and Israel. It brings Jewish teenagers from all over the world to Poland on Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) to march from Auschwitz to Birkenau, the largest concentration camp complex built during World War II, and to subsequently travel to Israel to observe Yom HaZikaron (Israel Memorial Day) and Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israeli Independence). The March from Auschwitz to Birkenau took place on April 21, 2009, and was themed "We stand for hope, not for hatred" in solidarity against Iranian President Ahmadinejad's anti-Semitic statements at the Durban Review Conference taking place simultaneously in Geneva. There were an estimated 10,000 participants from across the globe. Polish high school and university students also participated, as well as an international Christian group. Former Canadian Minister of Justice and prominent human rights advocate Irwin Cotler and Israeli Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom

were in attendance, as were several Holocaust survivors from the United States. The U.S. Ambassador to Poland and his wife represented the United States.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Representatives of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General Krakow regularly monitor issues relating to religious freedom and interfaith relations, including ethnic-Polish-Jewish relations and, as warranted, raise concerns with government officials. Embassy and consulate officers met frequently with a wide range of representatives of religious communities, the Government, and local authorities on such matters as religious freedom, property restitution, religious harassment, and interfaith cooperation. The Embassy and Consulate General actively urged the protection and return of former Jewish cemeteries throughout the country, participated in several cemetery rededications, and urged the Government and Parliament to enact private property restitution legislation. Embassy and consulate officers maintained contact and attended events associated with the Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim minorities.

Embassy and consulate representatives, including the Ambassador, regularly met with representatives of major religious communities, including leaders of the Jewish community, to discuss religious freedom. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met on several occasions in Warsaw and Krakow with government and community officials. Consulate general officials routinely attended commemorations at Auschwitz honoring the Jews, Roma, ethnic Poles, and others killed there. They also monitored developments regarding historical sites related to the Holocaust, supported efforts at commemoration and youth education, and facilitated official visits to the Auschwitz Museum.

Every year the Embassy sends four or five Polish teachers to the United States for a summer teacher training program on the Holocaust and also organizes the visits of U.S. officials to schools under the Embassy Speakers Bureau program. On May 6, 2009, the Embassy and City of Warsaw co-hosted a conference on "Multicultural and Multilingual Schools," which covered religious minority issues such as the classroom assimilation of Muslim refugee children from Chechnya. On February 13, 2009, the Ambassador honored Dr. Marek Edelman with the Embassy's Karski Freedom Award for his promotion of democracy and human rights within the country; among his contributions, Dr. Edelman was one of the

founders of the underground Jewish Fighting Organization and one of the three subcommanders in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943.

On April 3, 2009, the Embassy, in cooperation with the Center for Citizenship Education (an NGO) and the Warsaw Center for Educational and Social Innovation and Training (a local government center for teaching excellence) co-hosted a conference for 100 middle and high-school teachers from all over the country on Holocaust education entitled "The Holocaust as a Challenge for Modern Education." The Ambassador opened the conference along with a representative from the Ministry of Education. Elizabeth Edelstein from New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage also participated in the conference and conducted workshops throughout the country the week prior. Among other things, the conference included distribution of a poster set on rescue called "Traits that Transcend" developed in 2008 in cooperation with the Jewish Foundation of the Righteous in New York. Since 2007, over 2,000 Polish translations of the poster sets have been distributed to teachers of history, Polish literature, and civic education throughout the country.

Consulate General Krakow, in cooperation with local partners, hosted various programs under its "Bridges of Tolerance" initiative. In December 2008 the Consulate General joined the German, French, Italian, and Austrian Consulates to support a two-day conference entitled "Religion in the Public Sphere" as part of the Bridges of Tolerance program. This conference examined religion's impact on political life, education, and bioethics in Poland, other European countries, and the United States. The conference included a widely publicized art installation on a Krakow city tram about religious tolerance. National newspaper, radio, and television covered the tram art installation and the conference. The Consulate General regularly purchases materials focusing on tolerance for high school English teachers. The Consulate General also has a section called "Resources for Teachers" on its website that includes materials on teaching tolerance.

PORTUGAL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 35,672 square miles and a population of 10.6 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identifies with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage states that it does not actively participate in church activities. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent include various Protestant denominations (including 250,000 evangelicals) and non-Christian religious groups (Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians, among others). In addition, many of the estimated 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, more than half of whom are from Ukraine, are Eastern Orthodox.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular. Other than the Constitution, the two most important documents relating to religious freedom are the 2001 Religious Freedom Act and the 1940 concordat with the Holy See.

The 2001 Religious Freedom Act created a legislative framework for religious groups established in the country for at least 30 years or those recognized internationally for at least 60 years. The act provides qualifying religious groups with benefits previously reserved only for the Catholic Church: full tax-exempt status, legal recognition of marriage and other rites, chaplain visits to prisons and hospitals, and respect for traditional holidays. It allows each religion to negotiate its own concordat-style agreement with the Government, although it does not ensure the acceptance of any such agreements.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the Government under the terms of the 1940 concordat as amended in 2004 to comply with the 2001 Religious Freedom Act. The concordat recognizes the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference. It also allows the Catholic Church to receive a percentage of the income tax that citizens can allocate to various institutions in their annual tax returns. In addition, chaplaincies for the military, prisons, and hospitals remain state-funded positions for Catholics only. At the end of the reporting period, the Government had not established legal provisions to fully implement the 2001 act and the 2004 amendments to the concordat.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Public secondary school curricula include an optional course called "Religion and Morals," which functions as a survey of world religious groups and is taught by laypersons. It can be used to give instruction on the Catholic religion, in which case the Catholic Church must approve all teachers for this course. Other religious groups can set up such a course if they have ten or more children of that religion in the particular school. Representatives from each religious group have the right to approve the course's respective instructors.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Church of Scientology, although recognized as a religious association since 1986 and as a religion since November 2007, does not benefit from the 2001

Religious Freedom Act, since it has not been established in the country for 30 years or recognized internationally for 60 years, as required under the law. Scientology leaders were concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the act might have a negative effect on their ability to practice their faith; however, they reported no discrimination or opposition during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In contrast with the previous report, there were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

On October 3, 2008, a Lisbon court convicted 31 of 36 defendants of racism and crimes of a racist nature. The court sentenced six defendants to prison terms of up to seven years, marking the first time that the courts handed down mandatory prison sentences for hate crimes. The other defendants received suspended prison sentences, were fined, or were ordered to provide community service. The defendants were arrested in September 2007 for activities linked to the right-wing Hammerskin Nation organization. Charges against them included threats, harassment, physical attacks, kidnapping, illegal possession of weapons, and incitement to crime through the circulation of racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic messages.

The Government continued to promote interfaith understanding. Five days a week the state television channel (Radiotevisão Portuguesa 2) broadcast a 30-minute program consisting of various segments written by different religious communities. The Government pays for the segments, and professional production companies are contracted to produce the segments. Religious communities send delegates to a special television commission, which determines the scheduling of segments. The television commission has operated on the general rule that religious communities are eligible for the program if established for at least 30 years in Portugal or at least 60 years in their country of origin.

A government-sponsored Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue promotes multicultural and multireligious dialogue between the Government and society. Among its objectives are fostering tolerance for religious diversity, promotion of interreligious studies, and participation in national and international religious events. The group is led by a government-appointed chairman and consists primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, have professional experience in this area.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In addition, U.S. embassy representatives continued contacts with leaders of the country's religious groups, including the Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities.

QATAR

The Constitution and various laws provide for freedom of association, public assembly, and worship, so long as these freedoms are exercised in a manner consistent with requirements and standards of public order and morality. The law prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims and places restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Adherents of most major religions in the country worshipped without government interference, although there were restrictions. In May 2009, the Government issued a number of deportation orders to a multinational group of Christian expatriates for their involvement in unauthorized organized charity activities at labor camps in the industrial areas. All these deportation orders were later rescinded, allowing those affected to continue living in the country. However, deportation orders for two Indian Christians, possibly in connection with religious activities, were still being processed at the end of the reporting period. There were also reports of deportations of 40 Hindu families and a number of Christians in 2008, although the exact reasons for the deportations or links to religious worship were not substantiated. However, the Government took steps to allow for increased religious expression during the reporting period, as the Indian Inter-Denominational Christian Church complex at Mesaimmer (offering Protestant and Catholic services) was inaugurated, and construction continued on four additional church facilities within the complex.

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent government leaders, including the Amir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Heir Apparent Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Amir's second wife and consort wife Shaykha Muza Al-Misnad, and Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani took positive steps to promote religious freedom in the country.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,254 square miles and a population of more than 1.9 million, of whom 250,000 are citizens and nationals. Of the citizen population,

Sunni Muslims constitute the vast majority, while Shi'a Muslims account for less than 5 percent. There are fewer than 500 Baha'i and Christian citizens.

The majority of noncitizens are from South and Southeast Asia and Arab countries and are in the country on temporary employment contracts, in some cases accompanied by family members. Most noncitizens are Sunni or Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, or Buddhists. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Al Khor, Mesaieed, and Dukhan.

While the Government does not release figures regarding religious affiliation, some membership estimates for noncitizens available from Christian community groups are as follows: Roman Catholics (80,000-100,000), Anglicans (10,000-15,000), Egyptian Copts (3,000), and Greek and other Eastern Orthodox (no estimate available). The Hindu community is almost exclusively from India (estimated at more than 100,000), while Buddhists come from South, Southeast, and East Asia, and are estimated at more than 150,000-200,000. There are an estimated 500 Baha'is of Iranian origin, some of whom are Qatari nationals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and various laws provide for freedom of association, public assembly, and worship, so long as these freedoms are exercised in a manner consistent with requirements and standards of public order and morality. The law prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims and places restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam.

The Government and ruling family are strongly linked to Islam. Non-Muslims, however, serve in government posts. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, clerical affairs, and Islamic education for adults and new converts. The Amir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and personally finances the Hajj for citizen and noncitizen pilgrims who cannot otherwise afford to travel to Mecca.

Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy and is technically a capital offense; however, since the country gained independence in 1971, there has been no recorded punishment for such an act.

The Government observes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as national holidays.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims are tried under a unified court system, incorporating both secular law and Shari'a (Islamic law), with the exception of a separate limited dispute resolution system for financial service companies managed under the Qatar Financial Center. Separate Shari'a courts were abolished in 2003 following issuance of law number 10 of 2003, although Shari'a is still applied in certain cases. Most notable among these are cases of inheritance and the rules surrounding court testimony. There are also certain types of criminal cases, such as adultery and drunkenness, in which Muslims are tried and punished under Shari'a; however, all proceedings are conducted in the same unified court system.

Convicted Muslims may earn a sentence reduction of a few months by memorizing the Qur'an. Litigants in civil cases may request that Shari'a courts assume jurisdiction in dispute resolution and other civil matters. In 2005, a judicial panel for Shi'a Muslims was established in the courts. The panel decides cases regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other domestic matters. In other religious matters, the country's Family Law applies across branches of Islam.

According to the Criminal Code, individuals caught proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation of any religion other than Islam may be sentenced to a prison term of up to 10 years. Proselytizing on one's own accord for any religion other than Islam can result in a sentence of up to five years. Individuals who possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity can be imprisoned for up to two years. However, there have been no recorded convictions for proselytizing since the law's 1973 inception following independence.

Religious groups must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for legal recognition. The Government maintains an official register of approved major Christian denominations and has granted legal status to the Catholic, Anglican, Greek and other Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and Indian Christian churches. To be recognized, any denomination must have at least 1,500 members in the country. The MFA also requires smaller congregations to affiliate and worship under the patronage of one of the six recognized churches, all centrally located in Mesameer, outside Doha. While several evangelical Christian congregations are not legally recognized because they individually lack the required membership, some organize worship and are provided physical security for their congregations by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) when required. Other

religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Baha'ism, are not legally recognized, although adherents are permitted to worship privately in their homes or with others.

The Government continued to form and implement a permanent intergovernmental committee, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), to address issues concerning non-Muslim religious groups, including legal incorporation and sponsorship of religious leaders. The committee was not operational by the end of the reporting period; however, in April 2009, the MFA raised the status of the portfolio and placed the issue under the office of the Assistant Minister for Follow-up Affairs, the third ranking official at the MFA.

Islamic instruction is compulsory for Muslims attending state-sponsored schools. While there were no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attended secular private schools. Muslim children were allowed to go to secular and coeducational private schools.

The Government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of all religious books and materials. However, in practice, individuals and religious institutions were not prevented from importing holy books and other religious items for personal or congregational use.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Adherents of most major religions in the country worshipped without government interference, although there were restrictions. In May, the Government issued a number of deportation orders to a multinational group of Christian expatriates for their involvement in unauthorized organized charity activities at labor camps in industrial areas. All of the deportation orders were later rescinded, allowing those affected to continue living in the country. However, deportation orders for two Indian Christians, possibly initiated in connection with religious activities, were still being processed at the end of the reporting period.

Christian group worship was permitted among the six registered Christian denominations at a Government-provided area in Mesaimeer. In May 2009, MFA officials stated that unregistered churches and congregations are required to perform group worship under the patronage of one of the six legally recognized and registered Christian denominations, and as a subgroup of that particular church. For example, Protestant congregations would be required to register as a denomination of the Anglican Church. While government regulations for

denomination and congregation registration were still in the process of being codified, MFA officials stated that smaller congregations not meeting the threshold of 1,500 registered congregants, would require an endorsement from the council of churches, made up of the representatives of the six registered denominations in Mesaimmer, before being officially registered.

However, according to both senior Ministry of Interior and MFA officials, there continue to be no restrictions placed on individual and small group worship in places of residence and other designated areas within the scope of public laws on public safety, congestion, neighborhood impact, and other matters. This permission extends to all religious groups.

In February 2009, the Doha Criminal Court sentenced a Christian Lebanese expatriate to three years in prison and eventual deportation for blasphemy. The incident was brought to the attention of authorities by two non-Qatari Muslim men working for the Lebanese national, who alleged he insulted God during a dispute over attendance. Also in 2009, six Lebanese mechanics were sentenced to three years imprisonment each and subsequent deportation for "uttering blasphemous words."

The Government prohibited Christian congregations from advertising religious services or using religious symbols visible to the public, such as outdoor crosses; the Government has stated, however, that this was done to protect the congregations from attack by Muslim extremists.

Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and other religious groups do not have authorized facilities in which to practice their religions. The Government generally considers members of these religious groups as transient members of the community not requiring permanent religious facilities or clergy; however, worship by these groups in private homes and workplaces is allowed.

While discrimination occurred against expatriates in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services, nationality, rather than religion, was usually the determining factor.

The Government places limits on the length of Friday sermons at mosques. The Government also previews the sermons for inflammatory religious or ethnic language that might incite listeners to violence. The Government may take judicial action against individuals and facilities when these standards are not met.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In May 2009, several public Sri Lankan Buddhist Vesak celebrations took place. In addition, throughout the year, several public Hindu celebrations were attended by thousands of followers.

Construction on the Indian Inter-Denominational Christian Church at Church City complex in Mesaimeer, outside Doha, was completed in 2009, and the complex was inaugurated in March. The complex is expected to house places of worship for 28 Indian denominations. Construction continued on the separate Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and Syrian Christian churches at the Mesaimeer complex in accordance with an agreement signed by the Government and Christian representatives in May 2005. Individual churches within the Indian Inter-Denominational Christian Church that began services during the reporting period included the Mar Thoma Syrian church in June as well as the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar church and the Pentecostal church building in May. In 2008, a Roman Catholic church opened for services, becoming the first church built in Doha.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders, including the Amir, took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Discrimination was largely absent; however, there were a few reports of anti-Semitism in the media.

On occasion, in response to political events and developments in the region, some privately owned newspapers carried editorials and cartoons depicting caricatures of Jews and Jewish symbols that compared Israeli leaders and Israel to Hitler and the Nazis. These occurred primarily in the Arabic daily newspapers, *Al-Watan*, *Al-Sharq*, and *Al-Raya*, and drew no government response.

On January 9, 2009, Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradawi, in an angry response to Israeli attacks on Gaza, delivered strongly worded anti-Semitic remarks. The remarks were also broadcast on the Doha-based Al Jazeera Arabic channel.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy facilitated contacts between religious leaders and the Government and coordinated initiatives with other foreign embassies to increase their impact.

U.S. embassy officials also met with representatives of religious communities to discuss religious freedom issues, including protection of the interests of minority congregations. The embassy brought these concerns to the attention of the National Human Rights Committee and other appropriate officials in the Government.

ROMANIA

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion. While the Government generally respected religious freedom in practice, some restrictions adversely affected the rights of some religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Minority religious groups complained less frequently than in prior years that low-level government officials impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities. The Government continued to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religious groups, and registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religious groups. Restitution of Greek Catholic properties seized by the Communist-era government in 1948 and transferred to the Romanian Orthodox Church also remained a problem. The Greek Catholic Church was the only denomination outlawed under Communist rule whose churches were confiscated and given to another denomination. The Government continued to make progress in recognizing the history of the Holocaust in the country. Some minority religious groups continued to allege that local authorities created delays in granting construction permits based upon religion.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were cases in which some Romanian Orthodox clergy showed hostility toward non-Orthodox church members, criticized proselytizing by Protestant and other religious groups, opposed the burial of believers of other religious groups in confessional or even public cemeteries, and opposed missionary activity. In general, the Orthodox Church continued to refuse to return the Greek Catholic churches that it received in 1948. The Orthodox Church often used its influence to put pressure on small groups and government officials to its own advantage.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy continued to raise concerns with officials about the failure of the Government to ensure the full restitution of religious properties, including Greek Catholic churches. The Embassy also strongly encouraged the Government's efforts to recognize the history of the Holocaust in the country, including implementing the recommendations in the 2004 Wiesel Commission Report, training teachers to

teach the history of the Holocaust in the country, erecting a Holocaust memorial, and commemorating the national Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 91,699 square miles and a population of 21.7 million. According to the 2002 census, Romanian Orthodox believers (including the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara) constituted 86.8 percent of the population, Roman Catholics 4.7 percent, and Greek Catholics less than 1 percent. While the Government stated that the census results were accurate, the Greek Catholic Church claimed that its church membership was undercounted in the official census and estimated that its adherents constituted 3.6 percent of the population. The following religious groups are also present in the country: Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Protestant Reformed Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustinian Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church, Unitarian Church of Romania, Baptist Church, Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church), Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baha'i Faith, the Family (God's Children), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Unification Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, Transcendental Meditation, Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Zen Buddhism.

Most religious groups are dispersed throughout the country, although a few religious communities are concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members (Lippovans) are located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims are located in the southeastern part of the country. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania, but there are also Greek Catholics in Bucharest and in the Banat and Crisana regions. Protestant and Catholic believers tend to reside in Transylvania, but many also are located around Bacau. Orthodox and Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians live mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are primarily in Banat. Armenians are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Members of the Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, Unitarian, and Lutheran churches from Transylvania are virtually all ethnic Hungarians.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the Government exercises considerable influence over religious life through laws and decrees. Government registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religious groups.

The Government observes Christmas and Orthodox Easter as national holidays. Members of other recognized religious groups that celebrate Easter on a different date are entitled by law to have an additional holiday.

There is no law against proselytizing, nor is there a clear definition of what activities constitute proselytizing.

The total number of officially recognized religions remains low. Under the provisions of the 2006 religion law, the Government implemented a three-tier system of recognition: *grupari religioase* (which are not legal entities), religious associations, and religions.

Gruparile religioase are groups of people who share the same beliefs but do not receive tax exemptions or support from the state.

Religious associations are legal entities that do not receive government funding, must be registered as such in a religious association registry, and receive only limited tax exemptions. This section of the religion law has engendered some confusion, since it confers tax exemptions "according to the Fiscal Code." However, the Fiscal Code itself does not address the issue of tax exemptions for religious associations. Unrecognized groups are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities. In order to register, religious associations must have 300 citizen members and must submit members' personal data, while the membership requirement for registration of any other type of association is three members. Religious associations are entitled to receive religion status if they have 12 years of continuous religious activity in the country and a minimum membership of 0.1 percent of the population (approximately 22,000 persons).

The 2006 religion law recognizes the same 18 religions that had this status prior to its adoption: the Romanian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustinian Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's

Witnesses. Recognized religious groups are eligible for state support according to their representation in the census. Additionally, they have the right to establish schools, teach religion classes in public schools where they have a sufficient number of adherents, receive government funds to build places of worship, pay clergy salaries with state funds and subsidize clergy's housing expenses, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, have cemeteries, and enjoy tax-exempt status.

The law entitles religious communities to bury, without restriction, their believers in the cemeteries of other religious groups in localities where they do not have their own cemetery and there are no communal (public) cemeteries.

Under the religion law, the state-provided budget is determined by the number of adherents of each recognized religious community in the most recent census and "the religion's actual needs" (an ambiguous provision). Some minority religious groups, such as the Greek Catholics, claimed that the census significantly undercounted members of their community.

The law governing the rights of foreigners, revised in 2003, introduced a long-stay visa for religious activities. Visa requirements include approval by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, submission of evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, certification of medical insurance, and a criminal record review. The law provides for up to five years of visa extensions. There are penalties for any foreigner who stays without a visa, but such penalties do not appear to be linked to religious activities.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance in religion classes is optional. To opt out of religion classes, students must submit a request in writing. The 18 recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools, but only if their adherents constitute a certain proportion of the student population. The law permits instruction according to the religious affiliation of students' parents. The Constitution and the 2006 religion law allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the state.

The law forbids public authorities from asking individuals to specify their religious affiliation for any reason related to their interactions with the state.

In 2005 the Government amended legislation governing property restitution with the expressed aim of expediting restitution, simplifying restitution procedures, and

broadening the scope of restitution. This law also covers the restitution of farm and forest land and other real estate to ethnic communities and addresses restitution to religious communities.

The 2005 amended law also introduced fines for officials who hinder the restitution process, and created a Property Fund to compensate claimants with shares of stock for properties (farm and forest land included) that cannot be returned in kind. However, the Property Fund was not listed on the stock exchange by the end of the reporting period. A 2007 ordinance provides for cash payments in lieu of restitution of up to approximately \$215,000 (500,000 RON), paid over a two-year period. Claims over \$215,000 are to be paid in cash and stock in the property fund.

Under the amended restitution law, church buildings used by public institutions (such as museums, schools, and hospitals) are to remain in tenants' hands for a period of three or five years, depending on the function of the public institution, during which time they are to pay rent to the churches. The majority of church properties belong in this category. This law does not address the Greek Catholic churches, which were confiscated under Communist rule in 1948 and handed over to the Orthodox Church; the 2005 amendments stated that the matter would be addressed in separate legislation, which was not adopted during the reporting period. A national joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee, set up by government decree in 1990 to resolve the situation of former Greek Catholic churches, proved ineffective, and this effort effectively ended in 2004. A 2005 law permits the Greek Catholic Church to resort to court action whenever the bilateral dialogue regarding the restitution of churches with the Orthodox Church fails. While this law enables the many restitution lawsuits to proceed, the law itself does not reconstitute properties to the Greek Catholic Church, and effective implementation of court decisions remained problematic.

A 2004 law, as amended by the 2005 legislation, provides for the restitution of all buildings that belonged to ethnic communities and were confiscated between September 6, 1940, and December 22, 1989. As in the case of religious properties, buildings used for the "public interest" would remain in the hands of the present users for either three or five years, depending on the current use of the structure. At the request of the Jewish community, the law extended the period of the confiscation of properties to include the time period between 1940 and 1944, when the pro-Nazi government seized a large number of Jewish properties.

Ministry of Justice regulations provide for unrestricted access of recognized religions and religious associations to any type of detention facilities, even if their assistance is not specifically requested. The National Administration of Penitentiaries can bar access by representatives of a religious group only if it can provide solid proof that the presence of the group in question would endanger the security of the detention facility. The regulations also forbid any interference by the management of penitentiaries with religious programs and forbid the presence of management representatives at meetings between representatives of any religious group and prisoners. Distribution of religious publications is not subject to any restriction. Prison representatives in charge of religious assistance may not be priests or representatives of any religious community.

The law entitles recognized religious groups to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts.

Local permits are required in order to build places of worship, similar to other types of construction.

A 2006 law to combat anti-Semitism bans fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations and includes the persecution of Roma in addition to Jews in its definition of the Holocaust. There have been no convictions under the law.

The International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Commission) Report (2004) made recommendations aimed at increasing public awareness of events that occurred in the country during the Holocaust. The recommendations included government reversal of the previous rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals, establishment of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day, construction of a national Holocaust memorial and museum in Bucharest, and enforcement of legislation making Holocaust denial a crime. In addition, the Commission recommended the comprehensive inclusion of the accurate history of the Holocaust in school curricula and textbooks.

During the reporting period, the Orthodox Church increased pressure on parliamentarians to support a draft law stipulating that the restitution of land and other properties should be in direct proportion to the number of believers -- a law that would, in effect, legitimize to a great extent the Communists' decision to give Greek Catholic properties to the Orthodox Church. The draft remained under debate in Parliament. Several human rights NGOs and the Greek Catholic Church have complained that state authorities have not answered their criticisms of the draft law. The Orthodox Church opined that because the two churches are

recognized religions, the state should help them settle the dispute. In response, the Greek Catholic Church countered that the patrimonial dispute between the two churches cannot be resolved by a unilateral draft law that ignores domestic and international law and legalizes abuses committed under Communist rule. The Greek Catholic Church believes that the state has the moral duty to retribute by law the properties confiscated by the Communists in 1948.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. During the reporting period, no religious association attempted to acquire religion status because of the restrictive legal requirements. Since the religion law became effective, 10 religious groups received approval from the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs to register as religious associations.

The Baha'is criticized the provision in the religion law requiring 300 members and their personal data for registration as a religious association, arguing that it is not only discriminatory but also against the law, which forbids authorities from asking individuals to declare their religious affiliation. The Baha'is also expressed concern about the lack of provisions regarding the burial of individuals belonging to unrecognized religious groups.

In June 2008 representatives of the Reformed, Lutheran, Unitarian, Greek Catholic, and Hungarian Baptist churches complained to the EU Commission in Brussels, arguing that the religion law discriminates against minority religious groups and, despite the constitutional provision guaranteeing religious freedom, the state unjustly favors the Orthodox Church. The minority religious groups further complained that the Greek Catholic Church has not received back its churches; students belonging to minority religious groups do not have equal access to religious education; the Orthodox Church receives disproportionately large funds and sizeable properties from the state; and the state does not sanction the Orthodox Church's actions that are against the principle of dialogue, i.e., destruction of properties that should be restituted, hate speech on state television, and discrimination against minority religious groups in public schools and the media. No response had been given at the end of the reporting period.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, the state budget for 2009 allocated \$35 million (105.838 million RON) to recognized religions for the construction and repair of churches. The Parliament distributed about two-thirds of this amount to 816 churches. This amount was allocated in direct proportion to

the number of believers for each religion as identified in the 2002 census, with the Orthodox Church receiving the largest share. Minority religious groups continued to complain that the Government delayed disbursement of the granted funds, which did not give them enough time to spend the funds for their intended purpose by the end of the calendar year, by which time any unspent funds must be returned to the state.

Some minority religious groups continued to report that local authorities for unjustified reasons opposed granting them construction permits for places of worship. The Greek Catholic Church continued to complain that the local authorities consistently opposed granting them a construction permit for a new church in Sapinta (Maramures County), where the local parish bought a piece of land in 2003.

In contrast with previous reporting periods, minority religious groups did not complain that local authorities and Orthodox priests prevented some religious activities from taking place.

Few politicians sponsor bills and measures that would displease the Orthodox Church. As 2008 and 2009 were electoral years, parties and politicians drafted laws that many perceived as favorable to the Orthodox Church as the majority church. For example, in April 2009 the Parliament passed a law increasing subsidies for the salaries of the clergy. In February 2009 the Parliament allocated a larger part of the state budget for 2009 to clergy salaries and earmarked a sizeable amount of money to 816 churches for construction and repair works, a move criticized by the Romanian Humanist Association, an NGO advocating for freedom of religion and separation of church and state. In October 2008 the Parliament amended a prior law and barred the investigation of possible ties between members of the clergy and the Securitate (a Romanian intelligence service during the Communist period) by a specialized body, the National Council to Study the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), unless their denomination specifically requests it.

Generally, local officials tended to be tolerant toward minority religious groups, but there were incidents in which they were pressured or intimidated by Orthodox clergy. In some instances local police and administrative authorities demonstrated a passive attitude towards stopping the harassment of minority religious groups (see Section III). In addition, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported that there were cases when the police told them not to do missionary work in several locations.

In Pesteana a Greek Catholic community established in 2005 continued to face discrimination and harassment. Tensions also continued because of a lawsuit between the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church regarding the latter's access to the local cemetery. At the end of February 2009, the Appellate Court in Pitesti ruled that the Greek Catholic priest can celebrate religious services in the cemetery only for those who die as Greek Catholic believers, and not for their relatives who died as members of the Orthodox faith. The Greek Catholics expressed dissatisfaction with the ruling.

The Greek Catholic Church complained that state authorities did not adequately respond to their complaints regarding restitution of properties or about discriminatory attitudes by local officials. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints complained about problems and lengthy delays in obtaining visas for members of the Church residing in Moldova.

In contrast to previous reporting periods, minority religious groups, including both recognized and unrecognized religious groups, complained less frequently that low-level government officials impeded their efforts to proselytize, interfered in religious activities, and otherwise discriminated against them.

Recognized minority religious groups continued to charge that public schools sometimes refused to offer classes on their religious beliefs. In addition, minority religious groups continued to report that at some festivities in public schools, officials required all students to attend Orthodox religious services. Similar official conduct requiring attendance at Orthodox religious services within the military was also reported.

Some minority religious groups also complained that authorities generally allowed the Orthodox Church to have an active role in opening ceremonies in schools and on other occasions, but that other religions were underrepresented.

An Orthodox religion textbook published in 2006 by the Ministry of Education with the coordination of the then-State Secretary for Religious Affairs continued to generate complaints and dissatisfaction among minority religious groups. The book describes the emergence of the Greek Catholic Church in the 18th century as the result of "Catholic proselytizing" and describes the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, and Mormons as sects "representing a genuine threat to the society." A chapter in the religion textbook alleged that sects proselytize using such means as brainwashing, bribing, blackmailing, and exploiting the poor. While the Government stated that the textbook had been withdrawn, the Baha'is reported that

they ordered it from a publishing house from the officially-approved list of textbooks for the 2008-09 school year and received the same textbook including the offensive text.

According to minority religious groups, the military clergy comprised only Orthodox priests, with the exception of one representative of the Roman Catholic Church and one from the Evangelical Alliance (Baptist), a situation the Reformed and Greek Catholic Churches perceived as discriminatory.

Minority religious groups continued to complain of a lack of provisions to provide for the free access of religious groups to state-owned media.

In many cases, religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining possession of properties that were confiscated under Communist rule. Many properties returned to religious denominations contained government offices, schools, hospitals, or cultural institutions that require relocation, and lawsuits and protests by current occupants have delayed restitution of the property to rightful owners. Although some progress was made during the reporting period, the pace of restitution was extremely slow, and the large majority of religious property restitution cases remained unresolved. In many cases local authorities refused to turn over restituted properties in which county or municipal governments had an interest and challenged in court the decisions of the Special Restitution Commission, the section within the National Authority for Property Restitution responsible for restituting religious and ethnic communal property. There were complaints that the local authorities consistently delayed providing information about the claimed properties to the Special Restitution Commission, thereby obstructing the restitution process, despite fines stipulated by the 2005 legislation for such delays. There were many complaints that the Property Fund, which should provide compensation in stock, was not listed on the stock exchange.

The Special Commission for Restitution started its activity in 2003 and by the end of the reporting period had restituted to recognized religious groups 1,364 buildings out of a total of 14,716 applications. Another 343 cases were approved to receive compensation and 368 cases were denied.

Since 2003 the Special Restitution Commission returned only 125 of the 6,723 properties other than churches that the Greek Catholic Church claimed under the restitution legislation, and decided to grant compensation in 25 additional cases. The Church has also received approximately 65 of the 80 properties that were restituted by government decree in 1992, but mostly only on paper. For example,

according to Greek Catholic reports, the Greek Catholic Church still could not take possession of three schools in Cluj for various reasons, including ongoing lawsuits with the present tenants. In Bucharest, the mayor's office consistently blocked the restitution of a separate property, according to the Greek Catholic Church.

The Government continued to avoid adoption of legislation regarding the restitution of Greek Catholic churches by the Orthodox Church, which had received them from the Communist state in 1948. According to a spokesperson for the Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic Church has received, either through negotiation or in court, 152 of the 2,600 churches and monasteries it owned in 1948. During the reporting period, according to Greek Catholic sources, the Greek Catholic Church received only four churches from the Orthodox Church. Restitution of existing churches was an important matter to both denominations because residents were likely to attend the local church regardless of whether it was Greek Catholic or Orthodox. This had financial consequences because the number of members of a church is directly linked to the corresponding share of the state budget allocated for recognized religious groups.

Courts delayed hearings on many lawsuits filed by the Greek Catholic Church, and the lawsuits were often impeded by appeals by the Orthodox Church, as well as by the transfer of the cases to different courts. For example, in Sisesti, Maramures County--where a lawsuit over the former Greek Catholic church has been underway for 16 years--the High Court of Cassation and Justice decided that the lawsuit should start anew from the lowest court level. The lawsuit was in progress at the end of the reporting period, with the Orthodox Church asking for compensation if the court decided to return the church to the Greek Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the Greek Catholic congregation there continued to hold religious services in the open air. Despite these problems, the Greek Catholic Church received an increased number of favorable court rulings during the reporting period. A communiqué released by the Orthodox Church on February 13, 2009, expressed concern regarding the restitution of churches, priests' houses, and cemeteries to the Greek Catholic Church by courts. The communiqué mentioned that there were 106 ongoing lawsuits nationwide, 26 in Bihor County alone, and that Orthodox believers perceive the return of these properties as unjust. In response, the Greek Catholic Church emphasized that it reclaimed in court only those properties that had been its own and had been confiscated by the Communist regime. The Greek Catholic Church stated that since 1989 it had received via court rulings 21 of the 2,588 churches confiscated in 1948.

Historical Hungarian churches, including Roman Catholic as well as Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a low number of their confiscated properties from the Government. Approximately 80 percent of the buildings confiscated from Hungarian churches continued to be used as public buildings. Of approximately 3,000 buildings, 33 were restituted by government decrees; however, Hungarian churches could not take possession of all of them because of lawsuits and the opposition of current occupants. The Roman Catholic Church had still not received the Batthyanaeum Library, despite a 2003 court ruling. The Church filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights in 2003, and a decision was pending at the end of the reporting period. The Roman Catholic Church and the Special Commission for Restitution remained unable to identify a solution for the restitution of the building. Full restitution of the Roman Catholic Bishop's palace in Oradea remained impeded by the slow pace of repair and construction work at the new location of the Tarii Crisurilor Museum, which had not relocated from the palace. From 2003 until the end of the reporting period, the Special Commission for Restitution issued restitution decisions for 844 of the approximately 2,700 buildings claimed by Hungarian churches, rejecting 62 claims; however, Hungarian churches did not regain physical possession of many of these approved properties. The Unitarian Church won separate lawsuits regarding three buildings in Cluj and took actual possession of two of them. The Cluj mayor's office continued to delay signing the documents for the third building under various pretexts.

In the 1990s, the Government decreed the return of 42 buildings to the Jewish community. The community took partial or full possession of most of them, with only one case still pending. In many cases restitution was delayed by lawsuits. In Iasi, 18 land claims of the Jewish community remained unresolved, including a 51-hectare plot of land that the prefect divided and distributed to other persons. In this case, the county's land restitution commission decided to give different plots in compensation for the one that was sold, but the National Agency of State Domains challenged this in court. The Jewish community won the lawsuit, but at the end of the reporting period it had received only a plot of approximately six hectares. Discussions continued with the National Agency of State Domains to identify plots of land to compensate for the ones that were no longer available. By the end of the reporting period, the Special Restitution Commission processed 331 of approximately 1,900 claims and approved 53 cases for restitution and 107 cases for compensation. The users of 10 of the buildings challenged the restitution decisions in court. The Jewish community won seven lawsuits and took over six of the buildings in question. The community lost one lawsuit and two others were in progress at the end of the reporting period. The Jewish community complained

about restitution legislation flaws and difficulties in obtaining documents from the archives, as well as about the length of the compensation procedures.

Another frequent problem with restitution was a refusal by the occupant to return a property or pay rent for occupancy. The nominal owner could still be held liable for payment of property taxes in such cases.

The Greek Catholic Church also complained that, in many regions where it claimed farm and forest lands, local authorities, under the influence of the Orthodox Church, opposed restitution outright or proposed that restitution to all religious denominations be in direct proportion to the number of their believers. The Greek Catholic Church also reported that the Bucharest mayor's office continued to oppose the return of 40,000 square meters of land in Bucharest. In Cluj County, the authorities delayed the restitution of land to the Greek Catholic Church in the localities of Feleacu and Morlaca; meanwhile, local authorities gave the former Greek Catholic land to other individuals or companies. According to Greek Catholic sources, in Budesti, Maramures County, local authorities refused to return farm and forest land to the Greek Catholic Church and proposed instead to give land that had belonged to Jewish victims of the Nazi era. The Greek Catholic Church rejected the proposal. Other areas where local authorities did not restitute former Greek Catholic land include Chiheru de Jos, Maramures County; Rozavlea, Maramures County; Sapanta, Maramures County; Ungheni, Maramures County; Valcau de Sus and Valcau de Jos, Salaj County; Rozavlea, Maramures County; Haieu, Bihor County; Moisei, Maramures County; Tasnad, Satu-Mare County; Nadar, Bihor County; Salistea de Sus, Maramures County; Borsa, Maramures County; as well as in several localities of Resita Greek Catholic Archpresbyteriate.

The lawsuit regarding the restitution of 166,813 of the 192,000 hectares of forest land reclaimed by the Romanian Orthodox Church Fund of Bukovina continued and the case remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

The Adventist Church also complained that lawsuits involving religious issues usually lasted for long periods of time. For example, they cited a 2003 lawsuit, filed against the city hall of Scobinti, Iasi County, where the mayor along with the local Orthodox priest prevented the burial of an Adventist believer in the Adventist rite. No ruling on the case had been issued by the end of the reporting period.

The Baptist Church continued to allege that the Bucharest city hall wanted to expropriate a piece of land owned by the Church for the construction of a shopping center.

The local Muslim community continued to face problems with the burial of its members. Despite repeated promises by the Bucharest mayor's office, during the reporting period the community still did not receive land for the establishment of a Muslim cemetery.

According to Roman Catholic authorities and media reports, the issue of the 19-story building to be constructed within the protection zone around the Roman Catholic Saint Joseph Cathedral in Bucharest, a designated historical monument, remained unresolved. The Church argued that construction of the building might damage the foundations of the cathedral. In 2007 a court in Dolj County issued a ruling suspending construction. On February 27, 2009, the court of Dambovitza County ruled in favor of the Roman Catholic Church in a lawsuit challenging the legality of the construction permit. On June 25, 2009, a court of appeals in Ploiesti ruled in favor of the developer, thereby allowing the construction to continue. This generated widespread protests by the Roman Catholic Church, which urged the authorities to find a solution.

A similar situation existed in Constanta, where, during the reporting period, a developer started the construction of an office building several feet from a mosque built in 1869 and believed to be one of the nation's oldest. The mufti's office filed two complaints in court in 2008, asking for the cancellation of the construction permit issued by the Constanta city hall and for suspension of work. According to the mufti's lawyer, rulings on the complaints were repeatedly delayed, and some documents allegedly disappeared from the files.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Most mainstream politicians continued publicly to denounce anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country.

The Government continued to make progress in its efforts to teach the true history of the Holocaust in the country. Compulsory seventh grade history courses included the Holocaust as a dimension of World War II, and a ninth grade history course had a full chapter on the Holocaust. The Holocaust was taught in connection with World War II in 10th grade; as a specific theme in 11th grade; and in the chapter on national minorities in the 12th grade curriculum. There was also an optional course on "History of the Jews and Holocaust" for the 12th grade. The Government continued to train teachers in Bacau, Cluj, Bucharest, Iasi, and Craiova to teach about the Holocaust. In addition, the teachers received training for programs offered jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Yad Vashem Institute. The Ministry of Education maintained a website that included a guide to assist teachers nationwide who instruct courses on the Holocaust. The Ministry of Education also continued to distribute books and supplementary materials to help teach the Holocaust, and continued to sponsor national and international seminars on the Holocaust and the teaching of its history, as well as national contests regarding the Holocaust.

Between June 26 and 30, 2009, government officials and representatives of the Jewish community participated in the Holocaust Era Assets Conference, held in Prague and Terezin, regarding compensation for Nazi victims and restitution of properties, including sacred and cultural objects, confiscated from Jews during World War II.

In April 2009 the local council of Piatra Neamt decided to withdraw the title of honorary citizen from Marshal Ion Antonescu, following a request by the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust. The title had been given to the Marshal posthumously in 1999. The Antonescu Administration was responsible for the deaths of between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews in the territories under Romanian control during the Holocaust.

On March 3, 2009, after lengthy delays, local authorities issued the construction permit for the erection of a Holocaust memorial in Bucharest, and construction work began in mid-June.

In January 2009 government officials and members of Parliament attended and addressed a series of events commemorating the 1941 pogrom in Bucharest. In accordance with recommendations by the Wiesel Commission, the Government continued to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day in October 2008 with a solemn session of the Parliament and events in several cities. The events, many organized in local schools, were attended by officials and key dignitaries.

On September 17 and 18, 2008, the Government sponsored a regional OSCE Conference regarding combating anti-Semitism.

A religion law provision that allows recognized religious groups access to cemeteries belonging to other churches contributed to a slight decrease in the number of conflicts over the access of recognized minority religious groups to cemeteries.

During the reporting period, the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, jointly with the Conscience and Liberty Association (a nongovernmental organization (NGO) focusing on religious freedom), organized a symposium in Bucharest on religious assistance in the army.

Several religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, the Greek Catholic Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, reported that they enjoyed free access to detention facilities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During the reporting period, anti-Semitic views and attitudes were expressed by participants during talk show broadcasts by private television stations.

The modern-day incarnation of the Legionnaires (the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also called the Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group that existed in the country in the interwar period) continued to republish inflammatory books from the interwar period, and to publish magazines such as *Cuvintul Legionar* (Legionnaire Word) carrying anti-Semitic articles.

Acts of anti-Semitism, including desecration and vandalism of Jewish sites, continued during the reporting period with no appreciable change in frequency compared to previous reporting periods. The extreme nationalist press and individuals continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. Some groups held public events or made statements with anti-Semitic themes. According to the NGO Center for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism (MCA) in Romania, when such incidents occurred, authorities tended to rule out any anti-Semitic motivation behind the acts of vandalism, blaming them on children, drunkards, or persons with

mental disorders. MCA noted that Jewish establishments appear to be targets of choice for the "vandals," and expressed the belief that the investigations are not thoroughly conducted, adding that the recurrence of such acts is encouraged by the lack of prosecutions under the law.

Between April 12 and 14, 2009, 20 tombstones were destroyed in a Jewish cemetery in Botosani. The police started an investigation and identified four school students, between 14 and 16 years of age, who perpetrated the vandalism under the influence of alcohol in an attempt to show off. They were under investigation for desecration of graves at the end of the reporting period.

The Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania complained in writing to the General Council of Bucharest about anti-Semitic, pro-Legionnaire events taking place in Bucharest in institutions subordinate to the Council. On March 1, 2009, a Legionnaire book launch took place at a cultural center under the purview of the General Council. In January 2009 the Bucharest History Museum hosted two legionnaire book launches and a conference in which anti-Semitic, Holocaust-denying, and racist views were aired and literature distributed. The Bucharest City Hall answered the complaints by stating that the History Museum merely rented the location to the sponsors of these events.

On October 22, 2008, vandals desecrated 131 gravestones at a Jewish cemetery in Bucharest. A spokesman for the local Jewish community considered this to be an act of vandalism unparalleled in recent times. The President, Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Justice, in separate public statements, condemned all acts of this kind, including acts of anti-Semitism and racism. The police identified four school children, aged between 13 and 15 years, who admitted to having vandalized the cemetery.

There were several cases of unidentified perpetrators who painted swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti on the fence of a Jewish cemetery in Bucharest in June 2009; on the walls of a building in Bucharest in May 2009; on the memorial of deported Jews in Bistrita in September 2008; on railway electric poles in the railway station in Ploiesti in September 2008; and on the walls of an apartment bloc in Suceava, in which a leading member of the Jewish community lived, in July 2008.

In July 2008 an envelope with anti-Semitic documents arrived by mail at a synagogue in Timisoara. The Jewish Communities Federation filed a complaint, but the perpetrators were not identified.

There were approximately a dozen reported anti-Semitic incidents involving property destruction and vandalism during each of the recent reporting periods, ranging from painting swastikas on buildings, to desecrating graves and cemeteries, to vandalizing synagogues, Jewish-owned buildings, and, in one case, a Torah scroll. In these cases, police sometimes identified perpetrators, but most of them were not prosecuted.

Extremist organizations occasionally held high-profile public events with anti-Semitic themes. On January 10, 2009, a religious service to commemorate two Legionnaire leaders took place at a church in Bucharest, sponsored by the Prof. George Manu Foundation. The New Right Organization continued to sponsor events commemorating legionnaire leaders, including holding such a commemoration in Predeal on September 21, 2008. However, participation in these events is usually limited to small numbers of people. The New Right continued to foster the ideas of the Iron Guard in the media and on the Internet.

During the reporting period, the publications of the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM), headed by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, continued to carry statements and articles containing strong anti-Semitic attacks.

In 2007 the President signed a decree withdrawing the Star of Romania medal from PRM leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, known for making numerous xenophobic and anti-Semitic comments. Tudor challenged the decision in court, and the Bucharest Court of Appeals ruled in his favor in April 2009. The Presidency appealed the ruling and the lawsuit was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The Romanian Orthodox Church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers, and Orthodox religious leaders almost exclusively preside over state occasions. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances with prominent political figures, and religious messages often contain political promises or goals, as well as support for particular political positions.

Romanian Orthodox Church authorities were often intolerant of other religious groups and repeatedly criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant (Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist, Romanian Evangelical, and evangelical Christian churches), and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly described as "sects." This led to verbal conflicts in some cases. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of physical conflicts during the reporting period.

Minority religious groups alleged that some members of the Orthodox clergy provoked isolated incidents of organized group intimidation, impeded their efforts to proselytize, and interfered in religious activities.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, the press reported fewer cases in which adherents of minority religious groups were prevented by others from practicing their religious beliefs, and local law enforcement authorities did not protect them.

The National Antidiscrimination Council (CNCD), established to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds), received 15 complaints of discrimination on religious grounds during 2008 and four such complaints through June 30, 2009.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that verbal and physical abuse, in particular by some Orthodox priests, has decreased and that whenever such abuse occurred, the police responded. There were also no reported instances of priests confiscating religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported isolated incidents of harassment of missionaries by residents in several locations.

The Greek Catholic Church, Adventist Church, and Baptist Church continued to complain that Orthodox priests allowed the burial of non-Orthodox believers in confessional or even public cemeteries (often treated as confessional by Orthodox priests in rural areas) only when certain conditions were met; they allowed burials only in isolated sections of the cemetery if non-Orthodox religious services were not used. Such incidents, though in smaller numbers, continued during the reporting period, although the 2006 religion law allows religious groups access to cemeteries belonging to other churches. The Adventist Church reported that in some cases--for example, in Poienesti, Vaslui County, and Dumbrava Rosie, Neamt County--the local Orthodox clergy allowed the burial of Adventist believers in the Adventist rite only after repeated discussions between the Adventist Church and high-ranking Orthodox clergy. The Baptist Church reported that in February 2009 an Orthodox priest did not allow the burial of a Baptist believer in the cemetery of the village of Rosu, Ilfov County, unless the burial took place without a religious service in the Baptist rite. According to the Adventist Church, the authorities failed to implement a provision of the religion law regarding the authorities' obligation to allocate burial land to all religious groups. Moreover, the Baptist and Adventist Churches complained that the authorities failed to answer their requests to receive land for cemeteries. In one case, local authorities

reportedly refused to participate in an Adventist Church survey designed to identify public cemeteries under the law.

Orthodox priests also denied access for Greek Catholics to many cemeteries, including in Pesteană, Valcea County; Damuc, Neamț County; Ungheni, Mures County; Vintu de Jos, Alba County; Magina, Alba County; Radesti, Alba County; Telec-Bicaz, Neamț County; and Bicaz-Chei, Neamț County. The Greek Catholic Church mentioned a case in Pecica, Arad County, where the Orthodox priest did not allow the access of the Greek Catholic priest to the cemetery to bury a believer, instead burying her under Orthodox rites. An Orthodox priest also did not allow the Greek Catholic priest to bury a believer in the cemetery of the locality of Salva, Bistrița-Năsăud County.

Relations between the Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Archbishopric of Timisoara continued to be amicable and cooperative, with the latter restituting almost all of the Greek Catholic assets during the post-Revolution period. The Orthodox bishoprics of Caransebeș and Oradea also continued to have similar positive dialogues with the Greek Catholic Church regarding the restitution of some churches.

For the most part, however, Orthodox leaders opposed and delayed returning churches to the Greek Catholics, upholding the view that places of worship belong to the congregations and not to the religious denomination. In this view, the same religious communities that were Greek Catholic before 1948 and are presently Orthodox are using the churches. The Greek Catholic Church of the eparchy of Lugoj complained that the Orthodox bishopric of Arad, Ienopole, and Halmagiu, which was using more than 90 Greek Catholic churches, continued to refuse to retribute them and to hold alternate religious services. For example, in Silvasul de Sus and Silvasul de Jos, Hunedoara County, the Orthodox Church preferred to keep the former Greek Catholic churches locked instead of returning them.

Over the years the Orthodox Church has repeatedly rejected Greek Catholic requests for alternating services in more than 230 localities. In several localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, the Orthodox Church has done one of three things: alternates religious services between the two locations, for example in Gheorgheni, Cluj County, Brezoi, Valcea County; keeps the Orthodox church locked and holds their services in the former Greek Catholic church; or establishes a second Orthodox parish in the locality, either a new parish or by splitting an Orthodox parish into two parishes. During the reporting period, the Orthodox Church

continued to keep more than 15 former Greek Catholic churches closed, for example, in Salistea de Sus, Maramures County; Calea Mare, Bihor County; and Horoatu Crasnei and Starciu, both in Salaj County. Meanwhile, Greek Catholics held religious services in more than 100 unofficial places, such as in believers' homes and houses of culture.

The Greek Catholic Church did not receive a major cathedral in Gherla, Cluj County, which the late Orthodox Patriarch promised to restitute in 2005, and a cathedral in Baia Mare, Baia Mare County.

In March 2009, in reaction to a call by the Apostolic Nuncio for the restitution of Greek Catholic churches, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Cluj, Alba, Crisana, and Maramures labeled the statement "provocative" and reminded the Nuncio that his position has merely a diplomatic status, which does not entitle him to interfere with church issues.

The Orthodox Church continued to demolish Greek Catholic churches--some of which had been declared historical monuments--in more than 10 localities, half of which were in Cluj County. Authorities did not react to Greek Catholic complaints about the illegal demolition of a Greek Catholic church in Taga, Cluj County, in 2006 and an 18th-century Greek Catholic Church in Badon, Salaj County, in April 2007, as well as the beginning of the demolition of an 18th-century Greek Catholic church in Ungheni, Mures County in May 2008, where the Orthodox Church began by constructing a new church around the Greek Catholic church, entirely surrounding the historic Greek Catholic building. The Orthodox Church stopped the demolition after the Greek Catholic Church obtained a court injunction, but continued construction works.

In Salonta, Bihor County, the Orthodox Church continued to build a new church around the old Greek Catholic church, despite an ongoing lawsuit for the restitution of the church. The Orthodox Church in Salonta also opposed the allocation by the local authorities of a piece of land to the Greek Catholic Church for the construction of a new church.

In April 2009, in Sapanta, Maramures County, under the pretext of renovating the local church (which was Greek Catholic before 1948), the Orthodox Church demolished its steeple, announcing its intention to rebuild it in a different style. The renovation works are partially funded by the Ministry of Culture. Greek Catholic sources alleged that the Orthodox Church is doing this in order to destroy the neo-Gothic style of the steeple, which is indicative of its Catholic origin. The

Greek Catholic Church has property deeds for both the church and its cemetery, and also obtained a court injunction to suspend the demolition and construction works. The Orthodox Church observed the injunction, but only for a short period of time and only after it completed the demolition of the steeple. There were also some allegations in the media that the Orthodox priest instigated the population against the Greek Catholic priest, who, as a result, was the target of several physical assaults. The Greek Catholic Church sent letters to the local authorities, the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Culture, Justice, and Administration and Interior, as well as the President, but received no response. While the Greek Catholic Church claimed that the Orthodox Church did not have a demolition permit, the Orthodox Church stated that it had all the approvals required for the restoration works. The Greek Catholic Church further complained that, as a result of these developments, tensions increased in the locality and that the Greek Catholic chapel was vandalized.

In Nicula, Cluj County, the Orthodox Church continued construction which encroached upon the old Greek Catholic church of the historic Monastery of Nicula despite a court order to halt any construction. A decision in a slow-moving lawsuit over the ownership of the monastery remained pending. A similar case was reportedly developing in Orastie, Hunedoara County, where the Orthodox Church continued construction of buildings close to the former Greek Catholic church, presumably with the intention of subsequently demolishing it.

Longstanding tensions persisted between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches in many localities where large numbers of Orthodox congregants switched to the Greek Catholic Church. An example was in Stei, Hunedoara County, where the Orthodox Church continued to deny the Greek Catholics access to their former church, the object of a lawsuit. In the fall of 2008, the Greek Catholic parish in Stei eventually received by court ruling the rectory, restituted in 2004 by a decision of the Special Restitution Commission.

Representatives of minority religious groups credibly complained that Orthodox priests give out most of the religious assistance to hospitals, children's homes, and shelters for the elderly. Charitable activities carried out by other churches in children's homes and shelters were often negatively interpreted as proselytizing.

After the dialogue between the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches came to a halt in 2004, disputes between the two religious groups over church property increased in intensity. Greek Catholic communities decided, in many cases, to build new churches because of the lack of progress in restituting their properties

either through dialogue with the Orthodox Church or in court; however, their efforts were hampered by the Orthodox Church and, more frequently, the local authorities. Tensions continued in many localities where the Orthodox Church refused to comply with court rulings that ordered restitution of churches to the Greek Catholic Church, such as in Botiz and Bogdan Voda, in Maramures County; Lupsa, Alba County; Vintere and Holod, in Bihor County; and in localities where the Greek Catholic Church began lawsuits for restitution, such as Prunis, Cluj County; Stei, Hunedoara County; Camarzana, Satu Mare County; Vile Satu Mare, Satu Mare County; and Negru, Sanlazar, and Bocsa, in Bihor County. In Valanii de Beius, Bihor County, and Simand, Arad County, after refusing for lengthy periods of time to comply with final court rulings restituting the Greek Catholic churches, the Orthodox Church eventually handed the churches over to the Greek Catholics on April 2 and July 10, 2008, respectively. In Valanii de Beius and Prisaca, where the church was restituted during the reporting period, the two churches will hold alternate religious services until the Orthodox Church builds new churches. Tensions continued in Taga, where the Orthodox Church demolished the old Greek Catholic church in 2006, as well as in Salva, Bistrita-Nasaud County, and Sinca Veche, Brasov County, where the Orthodox priests refused to hand over the rectories, despite decisions restituting them to the Greek Catholic Church.

In Dumbraveni, Sibiu County, the Orthodox Church continued to refuse to enforce a previous court ruling to share a local church with the Greek Catholic Church. Although the Orthodox Church had signed a protocol promising to return the Greek Catholic church after it completed the construction of a new Orthodox church, it continued to refuse to do so after the construction was complete.

A Roman Catholic Csango community, a group that speaks a Hungarian dialect, continued to complain that they were unable to hold religious services in their mother tongue because of opposition by the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Iasi. In October 2008 the presidents of the Romanian and Hungarian parliaments sent a letter to Pope Benedict XVI requesting his support for religious services in Hungarian for this group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Government maintained active public outreach on religious freedom. The Embassy maintained close contact with a broad range of religious groups and NGOs in the country, including Muslim groups and other minority religious groups, to monitor and discuss religious freedom. The Ambassador and other embassy representatives regularly met and raised religious freedom concerns with religious leaders and government officials who work on religious affairs.

The Ambassador, Chargé d'Affaires and other embassy officials repeatedly raised concerns about the slow restitution of religious properties, particularly of Greek Catholic churches, with government officials, including the President, Prime Minister, and the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs. U.S. officials continued to advocate in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution matters, including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups. The Embassy also specifically raised its concerns with government authorities and with the Orthodox Church over the continuing destruction of the historic Greek Catholic church structures in Ungheni and Sapanta.

Throughout the reporting period, embassy representatives and other U.S. Government officials discussed with government officials at multiple levels the importance of full official recognition of the Holocaust in the country, improvements in Holocaust education in school curricula, and implementation of the 2004 recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The Embassy supported visiting delegations focusing on matters related to the Holocaust, including the Wiesel Commission members. Embassy personnel and visiting U.S. officials repeatedly discussed the Holocaust in the country with local and international members of the Wiesel Commission and supported its work. Among many other events, embassy officials participated in the commemoration of National Holocaust Day in October 2008. The Embassy also supported the activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and urged Bucharest authorities to approve construction of a Holocaust memorial in the city. The Embassy sponsored a project, titled "Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding Through Knowing the 20th Century Tragedies, Holocaust and Communism: New Education of the 21st Century," to develop a training course for history teachers in order to increase the number of high schools in which students will have a better understanding of the Holocaust and the history of Jews. The project extended from September 1, 2007 to September 15, 2008.

RUSSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions remained largely the same for most religious groups, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies, such as the Department of Non-Profit Organizations within the Ministry of Justice, and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of a few religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" (the 1997 Law) continued to seriously disadvantage some religious groups viewed as non-traditional. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), treated the leadership of some Islamic and non-traditional groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, as security threats.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens, but there were some problems between majority and minority groups. Prejudices against non-Orthodox religions were behind manifestations of anti-Semitism and occasional friction with non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Because xenophobia, racism, and religious bigotry are often intertwined, it was often difficult to discern the particular motivation for discrimination against members of religious groups. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) occasionally disseminated negative publications and held protest meetings against religious groups considered nontraditional, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy publicly stated their opposition to any expansion of the presence of non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Some prominent societal leaders, including Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy and consulates worked

with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly supported the implementation of these programs. The Embassy and consulates maintained a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings to discuss the U.S. Government's concerns. Embassy officers looked into possible violations of religious freedom and discussed visa issues affecting religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials, and other Department of State and U.S. government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 6,592,769 square miles and a population of 142 million. In practice, only a minority of citizens actively participated in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a religious group participated in religious life rarely or not at all. There is no single set of reliable statistics that breaks down the population by denomination, and the statistics below are compiled from government, polling, and religious group sources.

Approximately 100 million citizens identify themselves as Russian Orthodox. Muslims, with a population estimated between 10 million and 23 million, form the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Ural region and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations. There are an estimated one million Buddhists, the majority of whom live in the traditionally Buddhist regions of Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. According to the NGO Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants make up the second largest group of Christian believers, with 3,500 registered organizations and more than 2 million followers. The Roman Catholic Church estimated that there are 600,000 Catholics, most of whom are not ethnic Russians. There are an estimated 250,000 Jews, the majority of whom live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In some areas, such as Yakutiya and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or along with other religions.

According to a statement by a representative of the Ministry of Justice in May 2009, 23,078 religious organizations were registered as of January 1, 2009, 1,115 more than January 2008. In June 2008 these groups broke down as follows:

Russian Orthodox (12,586), Muslim (3,815), Protestant (several denominations totaling 3,410), Jehovah's Witnesses (402), Jewish (286), Orthodox Old Believers (283), Roman Catholic (240), Buddhist (200), and other denominations. The majority of Russia's large economic immigrant population comes from Muslim countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups, most often through the registration process. The Constitution also provides for equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

The 1997 Law declares all religions equal before the law, prohibits government interference in religion, and establishes simple registration procedures for religious groups. The country is by law a secular state without a state religion. The preamble to the 1997 Law, however, acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage and also recognized the "special contribution" of Orthodoxy to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.

The Government of the Russian Federation observes Orthodox Christmas as a national holiday. Several regional governments, including majority-Muslim Chechnya and Tatarstan, celebrate other religious days as official holidays.

There is a universal military draft for men, but the Constitution provides for alternative service for those who refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience. The standard military service period is 12 months, alternative service in a Ministry of Defense agency is 18 months, and alternative service in a non-defense agency is 21 months. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments acts as a punishment for those who exercise their convictions. Students attending religious training institutions are not eligible for education deferrals from military service.

The 1997 Law creates three categories of religious communities with different

levels of legal status and privileges: groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations.

The most basic unit is a "religious group," which has the right to conduct worship services and rituals and to teach religion to its members. A group is not registered with the Government and consequently does not have legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, or the armed forces. Individual members of a group, however, may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In principle, groups are thus able to rent public spaces and hold services, but in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered significant difficulty in doing so.

A "local religious organization" can be registered if it has at least 10 citizen members and is either a branch of a centralized organization or has existed in the locality as a religious group for at least 15 years. Local religious organizations have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces.

"Centralized religious organizations" can be registered by combining at least three local organizations of the same denomination. In addition to all the legal rights enjoyed by local organizations, centralized organizations also have the right to open new local organizations without any waiting period. Centralized organizations that have existed in the country for more than 50 years have the right to use the words "Russia" or "Russian" in their official names.

The 1997 Law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups and thereby prohibit all of the activities of a religious community. Following the passage of the law, groups that failed to re-register by December 31, 2000 became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status.

The 2006 Law on Public Associations (NGO Law) contains some provisions that apply to religious organizations. The April 2007 amendments to the NGO law simplified and eased the requirements for religious organizations. Although each organization must still supply full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body, they no longer have to provide details of religious congresses, conferences, or governing body meetings, including the number of participants. The accounting procedures have been significantly

simplified. In April 2009 President Medvedev announced that the NGO law needed additional amendments in order to simplify requirements on NGOs and created a working group in May to propose changes. In July 2009, President Medvedev signed into law amendments approved by the State Duma and Federation Council simplifying registration and reporting requirements, particularly for small NGOs.

The NGO Law grants the Ministry of Justice the authority to obtain certain documents, send its representatives (with advance notice) to attend religious organization events, and conduct an annual review of the organization's compliance with its mission statement on file with the Government. Religious organizations are required to inform the Ministry of Justice of changes in leadership or address within three days of the changes taking effect. The required reporting includes information about "organized events and activities" and accounts of funds received from international and foreign organizations, foreign citizens, and stateless persons. The NGO Law contains extensive annual reporting requirements. Small organizations especially complained about the time and effort needed to fulfill them, and denominations with many local organizations noted that compliance with these provisions for each local organization is highly burdensome. The law allows the Government to file suit against organizations that fail to comply, and if a court finds in favor of the Government, the organization may be required to close.

In accordance with Federal Law No. 160-FZ of July 23, 2008 entitled, "On Making Changes to Individual Russian Federation Legislative Acts in Connection With Improving the Implementation of the Russian Federation Government's Powers," the powers of determining the procedure for conducting state religious studies expertise were transferred to the Russian Ministry of Justice. Ministry Order Number 53 of February 18, 2009 established a Council of Experts for Conducting State Religious Studies Expert Analysis. This order came into legal force on March 31, 2009. Alexander Dvorkin was elected by his colleagues to head the Council of Experts. Dvorkin is an outspoken proponent of categorizing minority religious groups as extremist cults and "sects." His objectivity for an official position that makes recommendations on which religious groups should be registered is disputed by minority religious groups and international observers. The Council will determine the religious nature of an organization on the basis of its founding documents and information about the fundamentals of its dogma and its corresponding practice; verify and evaluate the authenticity of the information contained in documents submitted by a religious organization concerning the fundamentals of its dogma; and verify the conformity of the forms and methods of

a religious organization's activity declared at the time of state registration with the forms and methods of its actual activity.

While neither the Constitution nor the 1997 Law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions, in practice the ROC cooperates more closely with the Government than do other religious groups. The ROC has entered into a number of formal and informal agreements with various government ministries that give the ROC greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, and the military. According to the Main Directorate for Educational Matters of the Armed Forces, as of April 2008 approximately 2,000 Orthodox priests served as voluntary military chaplains, 950 of them stationed permanently with a military detachment. As of February 2008, according to SOVA Center, out of 438 religious facilities in penitentiary institutions, 403 were Orthodox chapels, 23 mosques, seven Buddhist dugans, and three Roman Catholic chapels. ROC activities with the Government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones, holding religious services for those serving in conflict zones, and cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat extremism.

The ROC has special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations and other bodies such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces. Not all of the details of these agreements were accessible, but available information indicated that the ROC received preferential treatment.

Law enforcement officials, the ROC, and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include some Protestant and newer religious movements.

The 2009 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation states that "ensuring national security includes countering extremist activity by nationalist, religious, ethnic, and other organizations and structures directed at disrupting the Russian Federation's unity and territorial integrity and destabilizing the domestic political and social situation in the country."

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register

with state authorities, and they may not conduct services or other religious activities until they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

In November 2007 the Moscow City Duma (legislature) removed "religious proselytizing in public" from the list of administrative offenses in the new Moscow City Code.

The regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan have laws banning extremist Islamic "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. According to the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, three prayer rooms were closed in Nalchik, the region's capital, in 2004 for failure to comply with registration requirements. One prayer room was reopened in 2007, one now houses a district administration office, and the third remained closed.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintain consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and monitor application of the 1997 Law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion that includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continued to deal with the Presidential Administration through the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations, chaired by the head of the Presidential Administration. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academic specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major non-traditional groups. Other governmental bodies for religious affairs include a Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations.

Religious organizations also may interact with regional and local authorities. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include suboffices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations. Religious minorities most often encounter problems at the regional level.

The Russian Academy of State Service, headed by Vladimir Yegorov, works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 Law. The

academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

The Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman contains a department for religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints. The Ombudsman's Office received 500-700 religious freedom complaints in 2008, two to three times more than in the recent past. Many of the complaints allege multiple individual violations. The office estimated that approximately 75 percent of these complaints represented genuine violations of religious freedom rights guaranteed under the law.

Religious complaints constitute 5 percent of all complaints received by the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, according to the 2009 Human Rights Ombudsman report. One-fifth of these complaints are cases of impeding religious activities, and up to 15 percent involve refusals to return religious buildings or allot land for the construction of religious buildings. Up to 5 percent of applicants complain about persecution by law enforcement officials. The number of complaints related to issues of religious education and registration does not exceed 3 percent, but has grown steadily. In an April 2009 interview, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin stated that in the latter half of 2008, the number of overall complaints to the Human Rights Ombudsman increased by 10 percent in comparison to the latter half of 2007. He attributed the increase to the financial crisis' impact on labor and housing problems in the country.

On July 4, 2008, the Duma adopted and the Federation Council approved amendments to certain federal laws intended "to improve the functioning of the Russian Government." President Medvedev signed these amendments into law on July 23, 2008. Among other legislation, the amendments concerned the Federal Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, primarily changing the procedure of theological expert review at the regional level. The influence of expert councils depends to a great extent on their composition. As noted earlier, the Ministry of Justice named Aleksandr Dvorkin (an "expert on sects") as chair of its expert council.

Some regional officials used contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, to restrict the activities of religious minorities. According to many observers, local governments are more susceptible to pressure from the local religious majority and therefore more likely to discriminate against local minority religious communities. Many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the federal Government intervenes in local cases, it works through the Procuracy, Ministry of Justice,

Presidential Administration, and the courts. The federal Government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

The federal Government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it continues to allow public use of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Religion is taught in Sunday schools, in public secondary schools, and in specialized religious schools (lyceums, gymnasias); the latter have the status of a secondary educational institution. Several regions offer a course on Orthodox Christianity in public schools. In practice students may be compelled to take this course where schools do not provide alternatives.

The Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation published statistics on religious education on August 29, 2008. In Belgorod Oblast (region), more than 140,000 school children of the region studied religion in 2007. Chechnya placed second in the number of students studying religion (more than 93,000), with Ingushetia having the third highest total (34,000). Seventeen regions, mostly in central and southern Russia, reported at least 1,000 pupils studying religion. These regions include Vladimir, Kaluga, Lipetsk, Pskov, Tambov, Tver, Tula, Rostov Oblasts, and Stavropol Kray. Other regions of this group are Tatarstan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Taymyr and Dolgano-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs, as well as Omsk, Chita, Samara, Saratov, and Kaliningrad Oblasts.

In 35 regions (44.3 percent of the total number of regions), fewer than 1,000 students study religion. In 19 regions (12.7 percent), no religious courses are offered in secondary schools. Several autonomous okrugs and republics are among these regions, including: Koryak, Nenets, Chukotka, and Evenki Autonomous Okrugs, and Altay, Bashkortostan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Mordovia, North Ossetia, Tyva, and Khakassia Republics. Astrakhan, Volgograd, Krasnoyarsk Kray, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, and Sakhalin Oblasts also fall into this latter category.

While there are more than 3,000 Sunday schools functioning in 79 regions of the Russian Federation, Orthodox Sunday schools account for 93 percent of the total (2,876 schools). The majority of these schools are in Moscow (625) and St. Petersburg (376). The Ministry counted more than 100 Islamic religious schools (50 in Samara Oblast, 20 in Kabardino-Balkaria, 17 in Tatarstan, 15 in Rostov, five in Chelyabinsk) and 78 Protestant Sunday schools (mostly in Murmansk, Leningrad Oblast, Sakhalin, and Chukhotka). The report added that 14 Roman Catholic, 11 Jewish, one Buddhist, and one Armenian Apostolic Sunday school operated in the country.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation announced on March 11, 2009, that it would send instructions to public high school students and their parents for completing upcoming religious education polls. Those surveyed will be given the following three religion course choices: Foundations of Orthodox Culture, A History of World Religions, or Foundations of Islam and Muslim Culture. The chosen subject will become a compulsory subject in the curriculum.

Some regions offer a class on "History of Religion," a proposal that the Minister of Education had suggested but did not introduce nationally. Although the Ministry of Education rejected continued publication and dissemination of a controversial textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, some schools continued to use the text. The textbook contained descriptions of some religious groups that members of those groups found objectionable. The Congress of Religious Associations in the Tyumen region appealed to the Governor and regional department of education to allow input from other religious groups into the religious culture curriculum, claiming that the course currently contains only the viewpoint of the ROC.

The 2002 Law on Extremism, amended in July 2006, can affect religious groups, particularly Muslim groups, by criminalizing a broad spectrum of speech and activities.

The 2006 amendments allow charges of extremism where persons are alleged to have defended or expressed sympathy for individuals already charged with extremism.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government selectively enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fall into four categories: registration of religious organizations, access to places of worship (including access to land and building permits), visas for foreign religious personnel, and government harassment of religious organizations or individuals. In the first three cases, religious communities rely upon government officials to grant them permission to assemble, own or build property, or allow persons into the country. While the individual cases are too numerous to mention, several examples in each category are detailed below.

Following the 1997 Law's registration deadline of December 31, 2001, the Ministry of Justice began to legally dissolve approximately 2,000 organizations that had not re-registered, sometimes despite complaints of groups who claimed they were still active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution decreased as this wave of dissolutions passed, and only a few were still being contested in court.

Many of the difficulties that religious communities face are rooted in bureaucratic obstacles and corruption, not religious bigotry. While it is nearly impossible to discern if groups are being targeted because of their religious beliefs or because they are vulnerable to demands by corrupt officials, the effect is a restriction on their ability to worship freely. In many cases, the problem lies not in the veracity of the government's charges, but in their uneven application by region and by religion.

In October 2008 the Ministry of Justice announced its intention to liquidate 56 religious organizations (including Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups) that had not submitted the appropriate documents for review. According to Forum 18, a respected international monitoring organization of religious freedom issues, several of the organizations noted in the Ministry's list challenged the warning successfully, while other organizations appeared to be inactive. As of November 28, 2008, only 19 organizations remained on the list of religious organizations proposed for liquidation.

Due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register. Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. Others operated without registering with the Government, meeting in members' homes.

As of April 2009 the Government had registered 409 Jehovah's Witnesses local organizations in 72 regions, but problems with registration in Moscow have continued since the organization's 2004 ban by the Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court and the Moscow City Appellate Court. The Moscow community appealed the ban to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and was waiting for the case to be heard at the end of the reporting period. The Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that in some cases authorities had consulted with the ROC in determining whether to approve their requests for registration.

Cases from Church of Scientology branches remain pending at the ECHR. Local authorities refused to register Scientology centers as religious organizations in

Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Since these centers have not existed for 15 years, they are legally ineligible to register as religious organizations and cannot perform religious services (although they were allowed to hold meetings and seminars). The Churches of Scientology in Surgut City and Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan) filed suits with the ECHR contesting the refusal of officials to register the churches based on the 15-year rule. Despite these difficulties, the number of Church of Scientology groups operating in the country increased from 59 in April 2008 to 80 by the end of the reporting period.

According to the Ministry of Justice, as of January 1, 2009, there were 23,078 registered religious groups operating in the country, 55 per cent of which are affiliated with the ROC. In 2005 (the last year for which statistics are available), authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations. The Ministry of Justice sent notifications of violations to 2,996 such organizations. The courts issued rulings to liquidate 59 local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period.

Many religious groups had difficulty acquiring land or permits to build houses of worship. Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities.

In the greater Moscow region, Muslim groups previously complained that they have been limited to only four official mosques that were established years ago. As of April 29, there were 14 mosques and prayer houses in the Moscow region. Mosques opened in Kupavna in December 2008 and Balashikha in March 2009.

Moscow Region Muslim Community "Rakhman" Chairman Rustam Davydov stated in December 2008 that only 20 Muslim groups existed in the Moscow suburbs. In comparison, the Russian Orthodox Church had approximately 1,300 parishes across Moscow Oblast, while numerically smaller confessions such as the Protestants (320 parishes) and Baptists (60 parishes) also exceeded the Muslim community's total.

In January 2009 the mufti in Cherkessk reported that the mayor of Stavropol had not returned the centrally located mosque, as promised by the Yeltsin and Putin governments.

In contrast to previous reports that the Sochi mayor's office denied the Muslim community authorization to build a new mosque, credible reports in August 2008 indicated that a mosque will be built in Sochi before the 2014 Olympics.

Many non-traditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship. Because they are small and often newly established, they typically lack the necessary resources to buy or rent facilities on the open market and must rely on government assistance. Because they are non-traditional, they frequently met opposition from the traditional communities and often were unable to find government officials willing to assist them with renting state-owned property. There were multiple reports of religious organizations who were not allowed to renew leases on public or private buildings. Representatives of numerous Protestant groups spoke about increasing difficulty in extending existing leases or signing new leases for worship premises, the majority of which are still state-controlled. Some religious groups reported that local authorities in recent years denied them permission to acquire land on which to construct places of worship. Authorities continued to deny construction permits to several groups.

Religious news sources claimed that authorities acting under the influence of the ROC sometimes prevented Orthodox churches not belonging to the ROC, including the True Orthodox, from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship.

The Suzdal Diocese Office of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) confirmed in February 2009 that the Federal Agency for State Property Management (Rosimushestvo) deprived it of 11 churches and two bell towers--including the ROAC's main church, Tsar Constantine Cathedral--in Suzdal, Vladimir Oblast, and its surrounding areas for failing to sign agreements of free use of the buildings. The ROAC appealed the decision at the First Court of Arbitration Appeals, which upheld the Oblast Arbitration Court's decision. The ROAC's lawyers challenged the decision, asserting that the use of the church buildings is under earlier "protection" agreements between the Church and the State Center in charge of keeping records concerning historical and cultural monuments, their use and restoration. The ROAC intends to appeal the decision once again at the Volgo-Vyatka Circuit Court of Arbitration. While attempting to remove religious objects from these churches in March 2009, ROAC officials were stopped by security service officials and prevented from removing them.

After the 1997 Law changed the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers, non-traditional religious groups reported problems receiving long-term visas. In October 2007 the Government introduced new visa rules that allow foreigners (including religious workers) with business or humanitarian visas to spend only 90 of every 180 days in the country. According to religious experts, these rules were not aimed at religious workers, but the effect has been to severely

restrict religious groups that rely upon foreign religious workers. The Roman Catholic Church, which relies almost exclusively on priests from outside the country, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with more than 300 foreign missionaries, have been particularly hard hit by this provision. While foreign religious workers seem able to acquire visas with few problems, the 90-day limit on their stay in the country limits their ability to work and significantly increases their expenses. Although registered religious organizations have the option to sponsor foreign workers and missionaries on work visas (which do not have 90-day or 180-day limits), this is a complicated process that places significant financial and administrative burdens on the organizations. Many organizations continued to report difficulties associated with the 2007 visa rules.

In November 2008 the Yaroslavl city administration published its "Guide to Sects," in which it labeled the Krishna Conscience Society (Hare Krishnas) a "dangerous totalitarian sect."

On June 18 Russian Orthodox Church Bishop Irinarch established by decree a Department of Religious Security and Assistance for the Victims of Destructive Cults and Sectarian Extremism in the dioceses of Perm. This bishop had previously spoken against religious tolerance programs in the region, saying that such programs open the way for "destructive sects" and their dangerous ideology to corrupt children.

Many religious groups were unable to regain property confiscated in the Soviet era or acquire new property. The Moscow-based SOVA Center said the property restitution problem was most prevalent among Muslim and Protestant groups.

Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religious groups continued to pursue restitution cases. In October 2007 a new federal law came into effect which specified the conditions and procedures for transferring ownership of state-owned land. The law allows religious organizations to retain their current land plots for unlimited use until January 1, 2010.

The ROC appeared to have greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims, including claims to 30 properties in Moscow alone. The ROC continued to face property difficulties concerning the Yaroslavl Kremlin. All of the religious buildings at the Kremlin had been returned to the ROC by January 1, 2009, except the main cathedral. As of December 2008, the Moscow Patriarchate had 29,263 parishes and 804 monastic

habitations (monasteries and nunneries).

In November 2008 ROC representatives delivered documents, signed by the Oblast Minister of Culture, to the Old Believer community in Apeshino (Moscow Oblast) that approved the transfer of Old Believer property to the ROC. The documents stated that the Old Believer community had not complied with the Ministry's previously stated deadline for filing property ownership documentation.

Property claims by the ROC are legally complicated, since there was no separation of church and state before the revolution. Most of the Orthodox Church buildings that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property before 1917. The ROC was only entitled to use these buildings and theoretically could have been evicted, but there was no attempt to do so. The ROC fully owned only churches built, bought, or received after 1991.

The Roman Catholic community reported 44 disputed properties, including the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. While most state-owned property was returned, the community had no success with buildings that had been privatized. A Moscow Catholic leader stated that some issues had been resolved positively and that the Roman Catholic community would continue to work with authorities at the federal and local levels to resolve these issues.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The Federation of Jewish Communities reported that federal officials and some regional officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, although some Jewish groups asserted that the Government had returned only a small portion of the total properties confiscated during the Soviet period. The international Chabad Lubavitch organization repeatedly sought return of the Schneerson Collection, a large collection of revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes, which the authorities consider part of the country's cultural heritage.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the Procurator General of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religions and of giving official support to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others. There were credible reports that individuals within the federal security services and other law enforcement agencies harassed certain minority religious groups, investigated them for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, and pressured landlords to renege on contracts with those groups. In some cases the security services were thought to have influenced the

Ministry of Justice to reject registration applications.

Four times a year, the Government updates a list of banned extremist publications. According to the SOVA Center, there has been a growing tendency toward prosecution for blasphemy under the umbrella of extremism. Those who publish or distribute the texts face a four-year prison term. The current list includes Islamic religious texts, a series of neo-pagan materials intolerant of other religions (Christianity in particular), and several texts that were explicitly racist or anti-Semitic. The SOVA Center noted in its annual report on xenophobia that "the federal list of extremist materials, whose quality is so poor that one cannot simply use it, is rapidly enlarging." Forum 18 reported in May 2009 that there are 367 items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

On April 21, 2009, the Meshchanskiy court in Moscow ruled the contents of Aleksey Ivanov's "Reply to the Patriarch" to be extremist. On April 23, 2009, Alexey Mikhailov, leader of the Patriot's Opinion club in Arkhanghelsk, went on trial for inciting hatred against Jews and other ethnic groups.

In February 2008 the Government added to the list of banned books the widely read *The Personality of a Muslim*, a moderate and pacifist work by Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi. The Chairman of the Council of Muftis, Ravil Gaynutdin, condemned the ban as a violation of the freedom of religious belief. In February 2008 a lawyer from Izhevsk filed a complaint with the ECHR protesting the ban on the Islamic religious book.

In May 2008 charges were initiated against Aslambek Ezhayev, the Director of the Islamic publishing house "Umma" and head of the Publishing Department of the Moscow Islamic University, for inciting religious hatred by publishing *The Personality of a Muslim*. Authorities later dropped charges against Ezhayev for inciting religious hatred but instead charged him with violating article 146 (unlawful use of copyright items for the purpose of profiting from use of position of authority) and article 273 (use of harmful software) of the Criminal Code in March 2009.

Law enforcement officials often harassed members of religious organizations.

On February 1, 2009, an investigator and prosecutor's office representative in Asbest, a small town in Sverdlovsk Oblast, contacted a legal representative of Jehovah's Witnesses. He provided a list of the names of individuals who would be summoned for further questioning surrounding charges that the Jehovah's

Witnesses congregation had distributed extremist literature. In March 2009 the Jehovah's Witnesses received unconfirmed reports that the Asbest City Prosecutor's Office had filed a claim to pronounce items of literature as extremist.

On February 7, 2008, the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Asbest was raided by police and the Federal Investigation Bureau, who inspected the premises and seized literature for further examination. In June 2008 the prosecutor petitioned the Asbest City Court to rule that the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications *Watchtower*, *Awake!* and *Draw Close to Jehovah* were extremist and filed criminal charges against the leaders of the local Jehovah's Witnesses organization. The prosecutor's office is still gathering evidence and questioning local congregation members in connection with the criminal case instigated on the basis of the distribution of so-called extremist literature by members of the congregation.

In January 2009 in Taganrog (Rostov Region), the Rostov Region Prosecutor's Office filed a claim with the Rostov Regional Court to liquidate the Taganrog local religious organization (LRO) of Jehovah's Witnesses for carrying out extremist activity. The court adjourned the hearing, pending the results of a complex commission expert study of Jehovah's Witness literature.

The Jehovah's Witnesses LRO in Shakhty received a notice and warning issued on August 11, 2008, ordering the LRO to stop engaging in extremist activity. After an appeal against the notice, the Prosecutor's Office stated that it was lawful and that there were no grounds for rescinding it. On October 17, 2008, the prosecutor's office responded to the appeal against the warning, stating that an expert study determined that the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses is extremist in nature and there were no grounds for rescinding the warning. In December 2008 FSB and police officials reportedly questioned congregation members on several occasions.

On July 16, 2008, the FSB conducted a search of a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Yekaterinburg and seized religious literature. Eighteen individuals were unlawfully detained for up to nine hours in violation of Article 22 of the Russian Federation Constitution. According to Jehovah's Witnesses attorneys, the FSB agents psychologically and physically abused Anastasia Lelikova, pinning her to the wall and twisting her arms. All 18 individuals contested the lawfulness of the raid, using both civil and criminal procedures, but the complainants were refused access to court.

On July 15, 2008, V.V. Mitin complained to the Salsk (Rostov Region) Interdistrict Investigation Unit, Rostov Region Investigation Department, and the

RF Prosecutor General's Office (SIIU) that the literature distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses in Salsk contained signs of religious extremism because it preached the superiority of Jehovah's Witnesses over other religions and incited religious enmity. The 12 pieces of literature accompanying the complaint were sent by Investigator S.V. Gruzinov of the SIIU to the Rostov Center for Court Expert Studies for linguistic examination. On December 8, 2008, the Salsk City Prosecutor's Office filed a claim with the Salsk City Court to have the literature declared extremist. Court hearings started on March 12 and in May the Court partially satisfied the prosecution's petition by demanding that the materials be examined by religious experts. Religious experts in Moscow analyzed these materials. The proceedings were then suspended. The prosecution applied for revocation of this decision to the Rostov Oblast Court. On June 25 the Court granted this appeal and hearings were restarted.

At the end of the reporting period, seven court cases had been opened requesting a ban of Jehovah's Witnesses literature on grounds that it exemplified extremist content, and four court hearings were taking place in the Southern Federal Okrug--in the cities of Rostov-on-Don, Salsk (Rostov region), Krasnodar, and Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia.

From March 2009 to the end of the reporting period, three defense lawyers in extremism cases against Jehovah's Witnesses in the Southern Federal Okrug were deported from Russia.

The Government permitted Orthodox chaplains and priests broad access to military bases. Protestant groups were more limited in such access. The military has Orthodox Christian, Muslim, and Jewish chaplains. According to the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, muftis expressed concern to Defense Minister Serdyukov that the military generally did not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some army recruits reported that fellow servicemen insulted and abused them because they were Muslim.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov continued to enforce the ban against women entering government institutions without headscarves. According to the SOVA Center, the regime in Chechnya has demonstrably been established as nonsecular.

According to the Slavic Law Center government officials in Elista, Republic of Kalmykia, threatened to take "extreme measures" against Seventh-day Adventists for not allowing their children to attend school on Saturdays. The commission brought charges against the Adventists and ruled that youth affairs officials should

interview the children to determine why they did not attend school on Saturdays. After the interviews, officials reported to the commission that the parents had "terrified their children" into refusing Saturday classes. The Elista City Court fined each parent USD3.15 (100 rubles) in March 2009. On April 24, however, the Elista city court ruled that the Adventists were not liable to pay the fine.

In April 2009 the St. Petersburg Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) University, a training facility for future law enforcement leaders, removed 1,000 copies of a textbook containing anti-Semitic passages. The Russian and Soviet history textbook, written by two professors at the university, contained statements promoting theories on Jewish conspiracies against the Soviet Union. One passage claimed that former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev stated to the Israeli parliament in 1992, "everything I did to the Soviet Union, I did in the name of our God Moses." The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) complained about the textbook and promised to launch its own investigation. The university subsequently fired the book's author, professor Vasiliy Drozhzhin.

On March 26, 2009, two tax inspectors from the Saint Petersburg Interdistrict Inspectorate of the Federal Tax Service informed Jehovah's Witnesses officials at the Administrative Center that they would resume tax inspection of the Administrative Center for up to four months. The inspectors also wished to view the residences of individuals living there.

On January 28, 2009, the FSB and the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Mordovia announced that they had shut down the activities of a Satanist sect founded and headed by a 24-year-old medical student. Officials claimed that the group distributed Satanist literature and performed "religious rituals accompanied by illegal actions, including alcohol marathons, sexual practices, and antisocial behavior." Officials initiated a criminal case, charging the student with organizing a union that encroached on citizens' rights. The court ordered law enforcement to take two members of the sect, including the leader, into custody on January 24, 2009.

A brochure written by Evgeny Gerasimenko and published by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Institute for Raising Qualifications connected Judaism to Satanism, according to a January 21, 2009 report by the AEN news service. The brochure, entitled "Extremism: Understanding, Socio-Economic, Political, and Historical Roots, and Trends," was distributed to participants at a meeting of police officials charged with combating extremism and terrorism. The brochure states that "Satanism, much like Chasidism, arose from Judaism, specifically its secretive

cruel and kabbalistic sects. Until the 18th century, it developed as a secret Jewish sect, but then broke off from Judaism and became one of Masonry's most influential currents. The core rituals of Satanic sects, like the preceding secretive cruel and kabbalistic Jewish sects, were blood rituals." According to the UCSJ, on January 25, 2009, Oleg Elnikov, spokesman for the MVD, responded to questions about the brochure by claiming that the author made "stylistic mistakes" and did not intend to offend Jews.

According to Forum 18 News Service, Baptists in the town of Lipetsk southeast of Moscow complained that the authorities were using "bureaucratic means" to restrict their activity in late 2008. Two local congregations lost legal status for failing to file tax returns on time. One of the congregations has been using a former Orthodox church (which Orthodox representatives now want returned) for nearly twenty years, and will be unable to defend its interests without legal status. Lipetsk's regional religious affairs official told Forum 18 that the Baptists are deliberately rejecting possible solutions "in order to aggravate the situation."

In November 2008 the Samara City Court banned the work of the Church of Scientology's Dianetics Center. The Samara Region Prosecutor's Office reported that Scientologists gave lectures and conducted seminars on dianetics and scientology without a license and also practiced "hypnotherapy and Ron Hubbard teaching."

On August 6, 2008, a Pentecostal student at the Kombi State Pedagogical Institute, Elvira Berea, appealed to the Syktyvkar City Court against a government decision to consider May 4--a Sunday--as a working day. Bereza claimed that the government's decision violated article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which assures citizens' rights to private and family life.

On July 8, 2008, the Prosecutor of the Novosibirsk Region demanded that the Novosibirsk Central Court close the Church of Scientology's Dianetics Siberian Center, claiming that it conducted education activities without a license. According to the prosecutor's office, "psychologically and pedagogically this program is anti-scientific and potentially dangerous for psychological health and is morally unacceptable."

In a May 31 interview with Radio Vest, the head of the Commission of Experts under the Ministry of Justice, Aleksandr Dvorkin, stated that the "tiny, totalitarian Church of Scientology was the government religion of the United States."

At the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov spoke about "Jewish domination" in Russia in a public address.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although there are several laws which address crimes motivated by ethnic or religious hatred, law enforcement agencies enforced these laws inconsistently, generally infrequently, and sometimes arbitrarily.

Authorities rarely prosecuted or sentenced those arrested for attacks and vandalism against religious minorities, and they often failed to bring hate-crime charges even when religious bigotry was clearly involved. Some government officials denied that there was a problem with hate crimes or claimed that if they did exist, they were manifestations of economic ills. Some government officials and human rights observers noted that, due to heavy caseloads, prosecutors chose to file easily proven charges of vandalism or hooliganism rather than risk an acquittal on the harder-to-prove hate-crime motive. As a result, hate crime legislation was often not enforced.

A resident of Omsk who put a fake bomb in front of a synagogue on November 2, 2008, was given a suspended sentence. He reportedly said that he was motivated by the proximity to the November 4 National Day of Consent and Reconciliation, which has been appropriated by far-right nationalists and often involves anti-Semitic and racist demonstrations and acts of violence. The defendant did not face hate crime charges but was convicted of spreading "a deliberately false alarm" concerning "an act of terrorism."

The Government used counterterrorism methods to commit serious violations of religious freedom against the Muslim population. There were numerous cases of Muslims being prosecuted for extremism or terrorism even when the accused had no clear connection to such activities. These included individuals detained for possessing religious literature such as the Qur'an or on the basis of evidence allegedly planted by the police. Local police allegedly subjected some persons suspected of Islamic extremism to poor treatment or torture.

According to human rights groups, a February 2003 Supreme Court decision to ban 15 Muslim groups for alleged ties to international terrorism made it easier for officials to arbitrarily detain Muslims for alleged connections to these groups. Currently, 18 Muslim groups are banned in Russia as illegal.

On May 7, 2009, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the international religious organization Tablighi Jamaat was extremist and banned its activity. The General Prosecutor maintained that Tablighi Jamaat is a radical organization whose goal is the re-establishment of an Islamic caliphate, but Tablighi Jamaat and some human rights activists claimed that the organization scrupulously follows the law and exists solely to educate people about Islam.

On April 28, 2009, authorities in Dagestan prevented an assembly of activists from Nurjular, a Muslim religious organization, in Izberbash. The Russian Supreme Court banned Nurjular from Russia in April 2008. A spokesman for the FSB said that all activists who participated in the meeting were questioned and released, and that their activities remain under surveillance "across Dagestan and elsewhere in Russia."

In July 2008 police in Sochi arrested Dmitry Drofichev, a member of a group of Old Believers, for allegedly insulting land inspectors and threatening to destroy their equipment. He refused to vacate land intended for development ahead of the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Two other unnamed Old Believers were subsequently arrested and sentenced to 12 days in prison for resisting house inspections.

In May 2007, during an interethnic brawl in Stavropol between hundreds of Russian and Chechen youths, Gelani Atayev was badly beaten and soon after died of his injuries. Eyewitness Zaurbek Akhmadov said that riot troops and local police cheered on skinheads as they physically assaulted Atayev, who had been handcuffed. Police then put Atayev, still in handcuffs, and Akhmadov, who had been shot in the leg by police as he tried to help Atayev, in the back of a police vehicle. According to Akhmadov, the police refused for over an hour to allow medical attention for Atayev or Akhmadov, and in response to Akhmadov's cries to help Ayatev and take him to a doctor, a policeman answered: "Don't worry. He won't be shouting Allah Akbar anymore." After an appeal from the Chechen Ombudsman for human rights, the Assistant to the Prosecutor General Kolesov sent a letter, saying: "Following the arrest of persons involved in the brawl G.R. Atayev was found dead with marks of injuries on his body in an OVD car, registered as belonging to Oktyabrskiy District Medical post of Stavropol." No further information was available at the end of the reporting period.

There were isolated instances of local officials detaining individuals who publicly discussed their religious views, but authorities usually resolved these cases quickly.

On May 13 and 14, 2007, police arrested and detained 15 members of the Voskresenye Baptist community in Ivanovo who were holding an event in a movie theater and distributing the New Testament and Book of Psalms. The organizers had a written agreement with the theater. The reason given for the police investigation appeared to be erroneous. The police tried to intimidate the detainees and urged them not to attend Baptist meetings, stating that it was a "harmful sect." There were no further updates at the end of the reporting period. According to a March 26, 2009 report by the Slavic Law and Justice Center, in March the Ivanovo Baptist community was fighting the deportation of a U.S. Baptist minister involved in the incident. In December 2008, Wallach Nil, a U.S. citizen, was ordered deported after many years of coming to the region for "charitable and religious" work. He was given no reason for his deportation.

On May 4, 2009, Pskov authorities banned a guest performance of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which was scheduled at the local drama theater for the next day. Although the official reason for canceling the show was "technical complexity," the *Express-Gazeta* paper reported that the Pskov Regional Committee on Culture canceled the performance at the request of the Orthodox diocese. The office of the Archbishop refused to comment on the case.

While most detentions for religious practices involved Muslims, there were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of non-Muslims on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries throughout the country for brief periods or asked them to stop proselytizing, regardless of whether they were actually violating local statutes.

On May 8, 2009, police in Salsk (Rostov Oblast) detained a Jehovah's Witnesses attorney with foreign citizenship for allegedly violating article 18.10 of the Administrative and Criminal Code on "Violating the Rules of Engagement and Use of Foreign Labor in the Russian Federation." Authorities claimed that the attorney had been practicing law without a valid license. He had been representing the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Salsk City Court and had been legally representing Jehovah's Witnesses with a power of attorney for several years. He was forced to leave the country.

On May 7, 2009, authorities in Ramon (Voronezh Oblast) detained Yuriy Panov and Nikolay Sitnikov, two Jehovah's Witnesses. Police identified the men as suspects in several local robberies and took them to the local police station where

they were fingerprinted and photographed. When the men refused to acknowledge any involvement in the robberies, police allegedly forced Panov to wear a gas mask, to which they cut off the oxygen supply. They also allegedly threatened Panov with sexual assault and electrically shocked him. Under duress, Panov admitted committing the crime. Police subsequently released both men and dropped all charges, stating that they had made a mistake.

On April 4, 2009, Russian Federal Security Service and police officials in Vladikavkaz detained and verbally abused two attorneys and one other traveler from Canada representing the Jehovah's Witnesses in a local court case. The lawsuit proposed to liquidate four LROs in North Ossetia (Vladikavkaz, Alagir, Mozdok, and Beslan). Officials claimed that the lawyers had entered a zone forbidden to foreigners when they pulled off the highway to visit the home of their driver's relatives. The Chief of Police spoke with Canadian embassy representatives, who were told that the group would be released without sanction. After five hours in detention, local law enforcement took the lawyers to the courthouse and told them that they would be tried for an alleged violation of the law controlling the movement of foreigners. On April 5, 2009, the local judge ruled that all three foreigners would be deported for violating the restricted zone and for being disrespectful to the police. The judge promised to free the detainees, provided that they would sign a statement indicating their desire to immediately leave Russia, which all three did. Police escorted them to the Vladikavkaz airport, from which they flew to Helsinki via Moscow without incident. The lawyers would be barred from Russia for five years if the deportation rulings come into force. The Jehovah's Witnesses have appealed the ruling.

On February 23, 2009, deaf Jehovah's Witnesses Vera Ivanova, Yulia Strokun, and Yelena Plotnikova were escorted to the police station in Bogdanovich where they were treated roughly and ridiculed for their religious beliefs by the local police chief.

In early 2009 the First Deputy Prosecutor General sent a letter to prosecutors' offices throughout Russia ordering wide-ranging investigations of all Jehovah's Witnesses LROs and religious groups. The prosecutor's office was requested to launch these investigations by the FSB. Subsequently, prosecutors' offices, the FSB, and police summoned members of congregations and LROs for questioning and visited Kingdom Halls and personal homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result of these orders, law enforcement, security services, and judiciary officials have opened more than 500 recorded investigations of LROs and unregistered groups of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. Additionally, a large number of

warnings and notices had been served on LROs through June 2009. On April 16, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin sent a letter to the Prosecutor General protesting "the prejudicial attitude of certain officials of the prosecutor's office" toward Jehovah's Witnesses and asked him to "take steps to prohibit mass violations" of their rights. Lukin had not received a response to his letter at the end of the reporting period.

In 2008 officials conducted inspections of Jehovah's Witnesses' activities in the Republic of Bashkortostan (Belebey, Uchaly, and Salavat), Altay Republic (Gorno-Altaysk), Samara Region (Tolyatti and Samara), Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (Vladikavkaz), and Krasnodar Region (Krasnodar).

The Government designated the Islamic organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organization in 2003. Col. Gen. Alexey Sedov, head of the Russian FSB's service for constitutional regime protection and counterterrorism, told journalists in Moscow in April 2009 that 10 Hizb-ut-Tahrir branches were "eliminated" in 2008. Courts in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Udmurtia also prosecuted more than 20 members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The Sovetsky District Court of Kazan initiated a trial of an imam suspected of ties to Hizb-ut-Tahrir on April 1, 2009, charging him with "arranging activities of a social or religious association or other organization" which the court had banned for extremism.

There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country. There were, however, numerous reports of short-term detentions on religious grounds.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In April 2009 the Moscow Branch of the Salvation Army reported the Moscow City government had approved its registration. In *Moscow Branch of the Salvation Army v. Russia*, the ECHR ruled in October 2006 that the Government's refusal to re-register the Salvation Army's Moscow branch violated its members' right of assembly and freedom of religion.

The Ministry of Justice dropped its claims against the Russian Biblical Society (RBS) in December 2008. In its October review of the Society's operations, the Ministry of Justice had questioned the religious nature of the RBS because its members referred to themselves as "non-denominational Christians" and the organization had no clergy.

According to the SOVA Center, in December 2008 the Solntsevskiy Court in Moscow refused to liquidate Emmanuel, a Pentecostal seminary, for operating without a license to teach. The Ministry of Justice had previously targeted Emmanuel as one of 56 religious organizations for liquidation.

During the reporting period, President Medvedev met with religious leaders and spoke several times on the need to combat interethnic and interreligious intolerance.

Federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of government and NGO-organized programs to promote tolerance.

The Commission for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, a government body headed by the Human Rights Ombudsman, released its annual report on human rights in April 2009. It publicized the difficulty that some religious groups faced in property restitution and land acquisition, and the difficulties that religious minorities faced with government officials.

Federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. While construction of the Museum of Tolerance, devoted to the history of the country's Jews and the Holocaust, was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011, the global economic crisis delayed the timeline. Construction was expected to begin in the second half of 2009.

Federal and regional governments often allocated funding for the restoration of religious buildings. In 2008 the governments of Moscow city, Moscow Oblast, Belgorod, Volgograd, Novgorod, Tver Oblast, and Tatarstan provided funding for such activities. While the majority of religious organizations receiving support were Russian Orthodox, some Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant organizations also received financial support.

In 2008 local governments resolved a few controversial situations involving various Muslim communities. Authorities in Kaliningrad and Kostumuksa

allocated land to local Muslim communities for the construction of mosques.

In 2008 the Seventh-day Adventist community in Novosibirsk successfully defended its property rights to a prayer house, three years after a dispute arose with the city administration.

Law enforcement organizations have achieved some measure of success in arresting members of Russian neo-Nazi and nationalist organizations, while courts sentenced several such persons to prison for their actions. In one instance, police and FSB officers arrested a neo-Nazi gang in Vladimir in late 2008 for crimes committed between June 2005 and early 2008, including vandalism of a Jewish charity in 2005.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including some physical attacks against individuals and communities because of the victims' religious affiliation. According to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, monitoring agencies reported 57 crimes of an anti-Semitic nature. Groups that monitor hate crimes reported at least 80 incidents of vandalism against religious targets, including at least 48 against the ROC, 13 aimed at Jews, and nine against Muslims. According to the SOVA Center, the number of reported incidents did not dramatically differ from past reports, but perpetrators acted more aggressively in 2008, often committing acts involving arson and explosives, rather than mere graffiti.

On May 25, 2009, unknown assailants killed the deputy head of the Dagestani Muslim Spiritual Board Ahmed Tagayev in Makhachkala, Dagestan. The Coordination Center of North Caucasus Muslims believed that Tagayev was attacked because of his opposition to radical Islam.

On April 20, 2009, unidentified attackers shot and killed prominent religious leader Musa Esmurziyev in Nazran, Ingushetiya as he left his car.

On March 2, 2009, unknown assailants pulled the director of the Ingushetiya Hajj Committee, Mullah Musa Meriyev, out of his car and severely beat him. Police initiated a search for the culprits, but no arrests were made. On the same day, unknown assailants attacked two imams of the Sunzhensky Region (Ingushetiya) with baseball bats while they sat in their car, then shot at the car before leaving the scene.

In February 2007 police charged suspects in the 2004 killing of Nikolay Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis. The case was expected to go to trial in the summer of 2008. According to Girenko's associates, the trial was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Both the defense and human rights activists complained about a lack of media attention to the case.

Anti-Semitism remained a serious problem, and there were several anti-Semitic attacks on synagogues during the reporting period, including on August 16, 2008, in Nizhny Novgorod, where unknown attackers broke a synagogue's windows.

On March 9, 2009, two young men dressed as neo-Nazis attacked two students, one of whom was the son of a Jewish Agency employee. The attack occurred during the Jewish holiday of Purim.

In February 2009 the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) issued a statement criticizing supplementary reading material for high school and university students in the Ulyanovsk Region. The Ulyanovsk supplement, entitled "additional reading" for students taking classes on world religion, portrays Jews and Judaism negatively; it blames Jews for the Bolshevik Revolution, characterizes Judaism as an occult, almost satanic religion, and accuses Jews of intending to dominate the world.

Crimes that would normally be considered bias crimes against a particular community were commonly charged as "hooliganism," as prosecutors, even by governmental admission, were reluctant to pursue aggravated charges of racial bias in crimes and were often content to apply a lesser charge. At times, there was a concern of not being able to win a court judgment of a bias crime. In instances where local authorities prosecuted cases, courts often imposed suspended sentences. Under the law, an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by ideological, political, national, racial, and religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced for up to three years' confinement.

There were many reports of anti-Semitic publications, including several small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles. Many of these publications appeared to violate the law against extremism and were readily available throughout the country. There were also reports of other anti-Semitic literature on sale in cities across the country.

On August 20, 2008, FEOR's Department of Law Defense and Struggle against Anti-Semitism sent a letter to an internet portal which hosted a web page for the *Rus Pravoslavnyaya* newspaper, a distributor of anti-Semitic literature. The Russian Prosecutor's office stated that it could not interfere in the case since the website is registered in the United States. The Kirovskiy City Court of St. Petersburg considered the case against the website's chief editor, Konstantin Dushenov, in March 2008. At the end of the reporting period, no charges had been filed.

Terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya promoted negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Hostility toward non-ROC religious groups sparked harassment and occasional physical attacks. Religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to differentiate between economically motivated crimes and those based on xenophobia or religious discrimination. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and occasionally staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religious groups.

Muslims continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in 2004 in Beslan, North Ossetia, interethnic and interreligious tensions resulting in discrimination persisted in the region without the authorities' intervention, according to NGOs. Government officials, journalists, and the public liberally labeled Islamic organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

Yuriy Kokov, head of the Interior Ministry's Department for the Fight against Extremism, announced on April 21, 2009 that Russian authorities dismantled the military activities of more than a dozen radical "Wahhabist" groups in the North Caucasus in late 2008 and early 2009.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and ROC believers were generally harmonious. Extremely traditional or orthodox versions of Islam were often associated in the public mind with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

Vandals desecrated several synagogues, Jewish community centers, cemeteries,

and memorials in Moscow, Kaliningrad, Leningrad Oblast, Mahachkala, Nizhniy Novgorod, Ryazan, Saratov, Ulyanovsk, and Yaroslavl.

The SOVA Center reported 36 violations of houses of worship in 2008, including 16 against Orthodox sites, seven against Jewish sites, six against Protestant sites, six against Muslim sites, one against a pagan temple, and one against Jehovah's Witnesses. This was a slight increase from the 27 acts recorded in 2007. Jehovah's Witnesses reported one case of arson in Chekhov on July 11, 2008, and three reported incidents of vandalism against Kingdom Halls. Police opened an investigation into the arson in Chekhov, with no results by the end of the reporting period.

The SOVA Center reported an increase in acts of vandalism of cemeteries-- 42 cases in 2008, compared to 34 in 2007. These acts targeted Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish cemeteries, and in many cases were done by teenagers.

Relations remained generally positive between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Bishop Ilarion, Chairman for the Department for External Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, noted on April 10, 2009, that Patriarch Kirill will not rule out meeting with Roman Catholic Pope Benedict XVI, should the Roman Catholic Church renounce its missionary activity in Russia.

The press routinely continued to refer to Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious "sect," although they have been in the country for approximately a century. Aleksandr Dvorkin, President of the Russian Association of Centers for Religious and Sectarian Studies, labeled the Mormons as a "sect" in August 2008. He claimed that "over 80 big sects" were active in more than half of Russia, and that minor sects numbered "in the thousands." In April 2009 members of the Ministry of Justice's Commission of Experts elected Dvorkin to chair the Commission.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported several physical attacks on their members throughout the country. They also noted a significant increase in the number of detentions of Jehovah's Witnesses by police and an increase in the number of reported physical attacks against members after the Prosecutor General's Office ordered regional prosecutor's offices to gather information on Jehovah's Witnesses' activities. The exact number of reported cases has not been verified.

On July 29, 2008, the press reported that the Russian Olympic team would receive spiritual care only from Russian Orthodox priests. All team members were also given icons of the Mother of God and the Savior as a sign of blessing from Russian

Orthodox Patriarch Aleksey II.

On May 15, 2009, a local prosecutor in Moscow charged former Sakharov Center director Yuriy Samodurov and former curator of the New Tretyakov Gallery Andrey Yerofeyev with promoting religious hatred under article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code for installing a modern art exhibit entitled "Forbidden Art" in 2006. The trial was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice and a number of minority "nontraditional" religious leaders asserted that the Government and majority religious groups increasingly used the mass media, conferences, and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions, characterizing them as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health, and asserting that these groups threatened national security. Television channels broadcast several programs about "dangerous cults and sects" and implied that these groups included Pentecostals and other proselytizing religions.

On April 10, 2009, the Central Court of Khabarovsk ruled that Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard), a youth group associated with the United Russia political party, distributed extremist leaflets at the July 2008 Indian Culture Festival accusing Hare Krishnas of "crimes against people and society," "sexual exploitation of children," "trafficking in drugs and weapons," and "murders and other illegal acts." The court indicated that the materials incited religious discord but only issued a warning to the group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, religious groups, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the U.S. Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok regularly raised reported violations of religious freedom with government officials. Embassy and consulate officers worked with NGOs to encourage the development of cooperative programs designed to train law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration and other government agencies, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials responded by investigating some of those cases

and by keeping embassy staff informed on issues they raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the Embassy and consulates general maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

One position in the Embassy's political section was dedicated to reporting on religious freedom issues. This officer worked closely with other U.S. officers in the Embassy and Consulates General around the country.

Consular officers routinely assisted U.S. citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; officers were sensitive to any indications that these cases involved possible violations of religious freedom. U.S. officials raised such issues with the MFA and with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Because U.S. missionaries and religious workers comprised a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the Embassy conducted a vigorous outreach program to provide consular services; maintain contact for emergency planning purposes; and inquire about the missionaries' experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He met with many religious leaders from the country and the United States to discuss their concerns.

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government on its adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the U.S. Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organizations, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations.

Officials of the Consulates General in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities.

RWANDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Local authorities continued to detain members of Jehovah's Witnesses who declined, for religious reasons, to participate in night patrols. Jehovah's Witnesses children were temporarily expelled from school for failure to sing the national anthem.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 10,169 square miles and a population of 10.4 million. Roman Catholics comprise 57 percent of the population, main line denomination Protestants 26 percent, Seventh-day Adventists 11 percent, and Muslims 5 percent. There are a growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 15,000), evangelical Protestants, and Christian-linked schismatic religious groups. Other groups include indigenous religious practitioners and Baha'is.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution prohibits the formation of political organizations based on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion, or any other division that may give rise to discrimination.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Assumption, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

The penal code provides for small fines and imprisonment of up to six months for anyone who interferes with a religious ceremony or with a religious minister in the exercise of his or her professional duties.

The law regulates public meetings and calls for fines or imprisonment for unauthorized public meetings, including assemblies for religious reasons. If a group is registered or their legal representatives are known to local authorities, no prior authorization for their meetings is required.

All nonprofit organizations, including churches and religious organizations, must register with the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Justice to acquire legal status. Although authorities have not granted official legal status to any religious groups pending passage of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) law under consideration in Parliament since 2003, religious organizations receive "provisional authorization" by presenting their objectives and plans of action to local and district authorities. Some religious organizations therefore operated without full legal protection.

The Government requires religious groups to provide advance notification of religious meetings held at night, particularly those ceremonies involving amplified music and boisterous celebrations.

The Government requires religious groups to hold services at their established places of worship and bans the use of private homes for this purpose.

Government officials presiding over wedding ceremonies generally require couples to take an oath while touching the national flag, a practice that Jehovah's Witnesses object to on religious grounds. This practice makes it difficult for members to marry legally, since few officials are willing to perform the ceremony without the flag requirement. For some Jehovah's Witnesses, placing their hands on a Bible on top of the flag is an acceptable alternative.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the April 2009 memorial week commemorating the 1994 genocide, the Government limited the conduct of certain celebratory religious activities, including baptisms.

There continued to be tensions between the Government and the Catholic Church about the role of current and former church officials during the 1994 genocide.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Local authorities detained and imprisoned 17 Jehovah's Witnesses for a period of one night to one week during the reporting period for failure to participate--due to religious beliefs--in night patrols. The police publicly beat one of the Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in Nyagatare district. In 2005 judges ruled that no law required Jehovah's Witnesses to participate in night patrols.

Seventy Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwamagana and another 150 in Kibungo were detained by local authorities on two separate occasions in August 2008, despite having notified local officials of their planned events. Both groups were released without charge the next morning. There was one report of arrest of two Jehovah's Witnesses, who were held for four days in Nyanza, for failure to provide evidence of voting in the September legislative elections.

In July 2008 police briefly arrested 112 residents, including children, in Rusizi District for holding night prayers in a private home.

Seventy-six Jehovah's Witnesses children, many of whom were secondary school students, were expelled from school for failure to sing the national anthem during the reporting period. In January 2009 school officials began readmitting these expelled students, along with 42 of the 112 children expelled in the previous reporting period. Ninety-four children were back in school at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2008 school officials in certain districts fired 215 Jehovah's Witnesses teachers for not participating in government-sponsored "solidarity training." None of the teachers was reinstated.

At least 38 members of evangelical Christian groups were briefly detained for boycotting national identification card registration for religious reasons in September 2007. Most members subsequently agreed to register.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The number of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for failure to participate in night patrols continued to decline in part because of government responsiveness to reports of Jehovah's Witnesses' detention by local authorities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Numerous associations and interfaith groups, such as the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Protestant Council of Rwanda, contributed to understanding and tolerance among various religious groups. The Interfaith Commission for Rwanda supported programs aimed at reconciling genocide survivors, released genocide prisoners, and genocide detainees' families.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Embassy officers held numerous meetings with members of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, leaders of the Muslim community, and evangelical Protestant groups to promote interfaith dialogue and discuss religious freedom. In addition, embassy officers regularly met with local and international NGOs involved in peace, justice, and reconciliation efforts that focus on religious tolerance and freedom. The Embassy raised individual cases of religious freedom violations with government officials, particularly concerning Jehovah's Witnesses.

SAMOA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,133 square miles and a population of 189,000. There are two main islands and seven islets in the group, with the majority of the population residing on the island of Upolu, where Apia, the capital, is located. The 2006 census revealed the following distribution of major religious groups: Congregational Christian, 33.6 percent; Roman Catholic, 19.4 percent; Methodist, 14.3 percent; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 13.2 percent; Assemblies of God, 6.9 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 3.5 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Congregational Church of Jesus, Nazarene, nondenominational Protestant, Baptist, Worship Centre, Peace Chapel, Samoa Evangelism, Elim Church, and Anglican. A comparison of the 2001 and 2006 censuses shows a slight decline in the membership of major or "mainline" denominations and an increase in participation in nontraditional and evangelical groups.

Although there is no official data, it is generally believed that there are also some practicing Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews in the country, primarily in Apia. The country has one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship; there is also a Muslim community that meets in a private home.

All religious groups are multiethnic; none is exclusively comprised of foreign nationals or native-born (Western) Samoans. There are no sizable foreign national or immigrant groups, with the exception of U.S. nationals from American Samoa. In recent years, there has been an increase in immigration of Chinese, Filipinos, and Fijians (mainly Indo-Fijians), often as service workers in local business or as contactors for building projects funded by foreign governments.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution provides for the right to choose, practice, and change the religion of one's choice, and the Government observes and enforces these provisions. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private as well as government actors.

The preamble to the Constitution describes the country as "an independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions." Although Christianity is favored constitutionally and public ceremonies typically begin with a Christian prayer, there is no official state religion. In practice village chiefs often choose the religious denomination of their extended families.

There are no requirements for the recognition of a religious group or for licenses or registration.

The Constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious education in schools and gives each religious group the right to establish its own schools. Public schools do not include religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Church-run schools in most villages provide religious instruction following school hours.

Missionaries operated freely within the country.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, White Monday (Children's Day), and Christmas as national holidays.

In May 2009 the Samoa Censor Board banned the film *Angels and Demons*, on the grounds that the film could engender discrimination against Catholics. The Board

also banned the screening of *The Da Vinci Code* when it was due for release in 2006. According to media reports, the decision was made after church leaders, including senior leaders of the Samoan Catholic Church, were invited to screen the film and offer an opinion on whether it should be shown in the country. The ban included cinema screenings, any television airing, and distribution of DVDs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religion freedom.

Traditionally, villages tended to have one primary Christian church. Now many larger villages have multiple churches serving different denominations that coexist peacefully. However, some newer, nontraditional groups face resistance when attempting to establish a foothold in a given village.

There remain minor tensions between Fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way) and individual religious rights. Such issues were debated and discussed at a major symposium in December 2008, which brought together the public and included the Head of State, Chief Justice, Deputy Prime Minister, religious leaders, political leaders, and academics.

Religious observance remains high throughout the country. There is strong societal pressure at the village and local level to participate in church services and other activities and to financially support church leaders and projects. In some

denominations such financial contributions often total more than 30 percent of family income. In late 2008 the Government established a taskforce to encourage religious communities to reduce societal pressure to make donations that result in financial hardship.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities. The Embassy met with a number of religious groups during the reporting period on visa issues related to their workers traveling to the mainland United States for study, mission work, or other projects.

SAN MARINO

The law provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 37.57 square miles and a population of 31,000.

The Government does not provide statistics on the size of religious groups, and there was no census data on religious membership; however, it was estimated that more than 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include small numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Muslims, Jews, and members of the Waldesian Church. In recent years the number of members of the Orthodox Church has greatly increased due to immigration from Eastern Europe.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Although Catholicism is dominant, it is not the state religion, and the law prohibits discrimination based on religion. Catholic principles permeate state institutions symbolically; for example, crucifixes sometimes hang on courtroom and government office walls. The Catholic Church receives direct benefits from the state through income tax revenues; taxpayers may request that 0.3 percent of their

income tax payments be allocated to the Catholic Church or to "other" charities, including other religious groups. Any charity or religious group can obtain this benefit by meeting the requirements of San Marino law No. 9 of 1993 (which requires that a recipient organization be established as a nonprofit with San Marino nationality). Such organizations do not need to register, but will be contacted by tax authorities should they be designated by a taxpayer, to prove their legitimacy and to make available their financial statements.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Saint Agatha, Easter, Corpus Domini, All Saints' Day, Commemoration of the Dead, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

There are no private religious schools; the school system is public and state-financed. Public schools provide Catholic religious instruction; however, students may choose, without penalty, not to participate.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Catholicism is not a state religion, but it is dominant in society, since most citizens were born and raised under Catholic principles that form part of their culture. The country's dominant Catholic heritage may inform individual choices on lifestyle matters such as marriage or divorce, although there is no government persuasion involved.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 386 square miles and a population of 200,000. According to the bishop's office, 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 12 percent Protestant, and less than 2 percent is Muslim. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to missionary activities. The number of Muslims has increased due to an influx of migrants from Nigeria and Cameroon. Some syncretistic beliefs are practiced, combining indigenous traditions with Christian or Islamic beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious organizations must register with the Government. To register, a group must first send a letter requesting authorization from the Ministry of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. Once the group has obtained authorization, it must submit its official name and charter to the national registrar's office to ensure no other organization has the same name. There were no reports that any groups were denied registration or that the activities of unregistered groups were restricted.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since there is no U.S. Embassy in the country, the U.S. Embassy in Libreville, Gabon, handles most official contact with the country.

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law and is severely restricted in practice. The country is a monarchy and the King is head of both state and Government. The legal system is based on the Government's official application of Islamic laws. Sunni Islam is the official religion.

As a matter of policy, the Government guarantees and protects the right to private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious services. This right was not always respected in practice and is not defined in law. Moreover, the public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited, and the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) continued to conduct raids on private non-Muslim religious gatherings. Although the Government also confirmed its stated policy to protect the right to possess and use personal religious materials, it did not provide for this right in law, and the CPVPV sometimes confiscated the personal religious materials of non-Muslims.

Although overall government policies continued to place severe restrictions on religious freedom, there were incremental improvements in specific areas during the reporting period, including better protection of the right to possess and use religious materials; increased scrutiny of and training for the CPVPV; somewhat greater authority and capacity for official human rights entities to operate; limited education reform; and selective measures to combat extremist ideology, including close government scrutiny of Friday sermons, and encouraging leading clerics to preach tolerance in their sermons. The King launched an Inter-Faith Dialogue Initiative (IDI) to bring leaders and followers of various faiths together for discourse and to intensify a national dialogue to promote tolerance and moderation.

The U.N. General Assembly endorsed the IDI in a special session on religious tolerance in November 2008. Although the IDI has not brought about any changes to the country's law, the King's speech at the U.N. session, which endorsed the concept of tolerance and respect for different religions, received extensive coverage in national media. Several educational institutions and private groups, including the National Center for Dialogue, held interfaith and national dialogue events throughout the year, including in public schools, indicating a greater willingness in the country to discuss religious tolerance.

The King's official title is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," reflecting the importance the royal family attaches to upholding Islam within the country as a central pillar of the royal family's legitimacy, both domestically and within the

global Muslim community. The deep connection between the royal family and the religious establishment results in significant pressure on the state and society to adhere to the official Saudi interpretation of Islam and conservative societal norms. Most citizens accept the idea that their lives should be governed by Shari'a; the debate is not about whether citizens should become more or less religious but about which interpretation of Islamic laws and traditions should guide their society. Notwithstanding the pressure for orthodoxy, there are varying views among the citizenry on what should constitute Shari'a and how it should be implemented.

Despite the diversity of individual views, the Government continued to enforce its official interpretation of Sunni Islam. Some Muslims who do not adhere to this interpretation faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of places of worship and community centers. The largest group affected was the Shi'a. Non-Muslims, most of whom are citizens of other countries, also face significant restrictions on the practice of their faith. There were fewer charges of harassment and abuse at the hands of the CPVPV, but incidents of CPVPV excesses continued to cause many non-Muslims to worship in secret, for fear of the police and CPVPV. Textbooks continued to contain some overtly intolerant statements against Jews and Christians and subtly intolerant statements against Shi'a and other religious groups, notwithstanding Government efforts to review educational materials to remove or revise such statements. The Government continued to screen and monitor prospective and current teachers who espoused extremist religious views; however, there were reports of teachers who, in defiance of government policy, promoted intolerant views in the classroom and did not face disciplinary measures. The Government also continued to screen and monitor government-paid clerics in mosques throughout the country, although some public officials and clerics made discriminatory and intolerant statements.

Senior U.S. officials discussed a number of key policies concerning religious practice and tolerance with the Government, as well as specific cases involving infringement of the right to religious freedom. On January 16, 2009, the Secretary of State re-designated the country as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,225,000 square miles and a population of more than 28.5 million, of whom approximately 22 million are citizens. There is no accurate

figure for the number of foreign residents. The Government estimates the foreign population at approximately 6.5 million. Figures from other embassies indicate the foreign population in the country, including many undocumented migrants, is more than 10 million. Estimates provided by other countries' embassies include 1.8 million Indians, 1.5 million Bangladeshis, 1.4 million Filipinos, 1.23 million Pakistanis, 1 million Egyptians, 600,000 Indonesians, 600,000 Yemenis, 400,000 Syrians, 400,000 Sri Lankans, 350,000 Nepalese, 250,000 Palestinians, 150,000 Lebanese, 100,000 Eritreans, and 50,000 Americans.

Accurate religious demographics are difficult to obtain. Approximately 85 to 90 percent of citizens are Sunni Muslims, who predominantly subscribe to the Hanbali School of Islamic jurisprudence. A number of Sunni citizens also subscribe to the other Sunni schools of jurisprudence (the Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'i schools).

Although estimates of the Shi'a population range from 5 to 20 percent, more reliable statistics put the figure at 10 to 15 percent. Approximately 80 percent of Shi'a are "Twelvers" (followers of Muhammad ibn Hasan, who they recognize as the Twelfth Imam) and are primarily located in the Eastern Province. Approximately 20 percent of the Shi'a population are Sulaimaniya Isma'ilis, also known as "Seveners" (followers of Isma'il ibn Jafar, who they recognize as the Seventh Imam), and they reside primarily in Najran Province, around the residence of their sect's spiritual leader in Al Mansourah. In the western Hejaz region, there are approximately 100,000 Ashraf (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and 150,000 Nakhawala.

Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners are not available. They include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians (including Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and more than one million Roman Catholics), Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others. In addition to European and North American Christians, there are Christian East Africans, Indians, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, and large numbers of other South Asians residing in the country. Ninety percent of the Filipino community is Christian.

Although exact figures from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call, and Guidance (MOIA) were not available, MOIA is responsible for 73,000 Sunni mosques and more than 50,000 Sunni clerics around the country. The two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina do not come under MOIA jurisdiction. They are the responsibility the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Shrines, which reports directly to the King; its head holds a rank equivalent to a

government minister. Thousands of other mosques exist in private homes, at rest stops along highways, and elsewhere throughout the country. No public non-Muslim houses of worship exist, but private Christian religious gatherings take place throughout the country.

In December 2008 the country hosted approximately 2.5 million Muslim pilgrims from around the world and representing all branches of Islam for the annual Hajj. Muslim pilgrims visit the country year-round to perform the Umrah, or lesser pilgrimage in Mecca, and to visit holy sites there and in Medina.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

According to the Basic Law, the country's constitution is the Qur'an and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and Islam is the official religion. It is the Government's policy to permit non-Muslims to practice their religion without interference as long as it is done privately within their own homes. Under the Government's official interpretation of Islam, there is no legal recognition or protection of religious freedom, which is severely restricted in practice.

The Government considers its legitimacy to rest in part on its custodianship of the two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina and its promotion of Islam. The official interpretation of Islam is derived from the writings and teachings of 18th-century Sunni religious scholar Muhammad ibn Abd' Al-Wahhab. Ibn Abd' Al-Wahhab's stance was originally a reaction to a number of popular practices of his time that he believed represented a regression to pre-Islamic polytheism. He taught that the Muslims of his day had become apostates, and that Allah was punishing them by allowing outsiders to colonize Arabia. He urged Muslims to be stricter in their obedience to Islam and advocated a return to what he considered the practices of the first three centuries of the Muslim era, arguing that every idea added to Islam after this period contradicted Islamic teachings and should be eliminated. The country's religious teaching opposes attempts by the Muslim reform movements of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries to reinterpret aspects of Islamic law in light of economic and social developments, particularly in areas such as gender relations, personal autonomy, family law, and participatory democracy.

The Basic Law establishes the system of government, rights of citizens and residents, and powers and duties of the Government. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state.

No law specifically requires citizens to be Muslims, but article 12.4 of the Naturalization Law requires that applicants attest to their religious affiliation, and article 14.1 requires applicants to get a certificate endorsed by their local cleric. Non-Muslims and many Muslims whose beliefs do not adhere to the Government's interpretation of Islam must practice their religion in private and are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, detention, and, deportation for noncitizens. Blasphemy is a crime punishable by long prison terms or, in some cases, death. Conversion by Muslims to another religion (apostasy) and proselytizing by non-Muslims are punishable by death under the Islamic laws adopted by the country, but there have been no confirmed reports of executions for either crime in recent years.

The judicial system is based on Islamic laws derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The Government recognizes all four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence and the Shi'a Ja'fari School of jurisprudence; however, since Al-Wahab's teachings were based on the Hanbali School, it is the dominant school of Sunni jurisprudence in the country. Government universities provide training on all the Sunni schools, but focus on the Hanbali School; consequently, most Shari'a judges follow its system of interpretation.

The Majlis al-Shoura (The Consultative Council) is responsible for approving laws and regulations, including those derived from Shari'a. The Consultative Council's 150 males and 12 females are appointed by the King. There are five Shi'a members. According to the Council Charter, the members should be "scholars and men of learning." There are no term limits for the Consultative Council's members; however, every four years the king must replace 50 percent of the Council.

Established in 1971, the Council of Senior Religious Scholars (Ulema) is an advisory body of 21 persons that reports to the King. It is headed by the Grand Mufti and is composed of scholars, Sunni religious jurists, and the Minister of Justice. The Council, supported by a Board of Research and Religious Rulings (Fatwas), is recognized as the supreme authority on religious rulings by The Basic Law (article 45). As such, its opinions (fatwas) form the basis of the legal system. Three members of the Council belong to non-Hanbali schools of Islamic

jurisprudence, representing the Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafi'i schools; however, none is Shi'a. Scholars are chosen at the king's discretion, and serve renewable four-year terms.

The Government permits Shi'a judges presiding over courts in the Eastern Province to use the Ja'fari School of Islamic Jurisprudence to adjudicate cases in family law, inheritance, and endowment management. There were only seven Shi'a judges, all located in the Eastern Province cities of Qatif and al-Ahsa, where the majority of Shi'a live. Shi'a living in other parts of the Eastern Province, Najran Province, and the western Hejaz region have no access to local, regional, or national Shi'a courts. Two of the Shi'a judges serve on the Qatif Court and two on the al-Ahsa Court. The remaining three judges serve on the Qatif-based Court of Appeals, which oversees the Qatif and al-Ahsa Courts.

In accordance with the Government's official interpretation of Islam, the law discriminates against religions held to be polytheistic. Christians and Jews, who are mentioned in the Qur'an as "People of the Book," are also discriminated against, but to a lesser extent. This discrimination is manifested, for example, in calculating accidental death or injury compensation. In the event a court renders a judgment in favor of a plaintiff who is a Jewish or Christian male, the plaintiff is only entitled to receive 50 percent of the compensation a Muslim male would receive; all others are only entitled to receive 1/16 the amount a male Muslim would receive. Furthermore, judges may discount the testimony of non-practicing Muslims or individuals who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam. For example, testimony by Shi'a can carry less weight than testimony by Sunnis or be ignored in courts of law, despite official government statements that judges do not discriminate based on religion when they hear testimony. Moreover, courts adhere to the Qur'an teaching that the value of a woman's testimony is only one-half that of a man's. Legally, children inherit their mother's religious affiliation unless the father is a citizen, in which case the law deems such children to be Muslims.

Other than the secular National Day on September 23, the Islamic religious feasts of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, each lasting several days, are the only recognized national holidays.

The CPVPV is a semiautonomous agency with the authority to monitor social behavior and enforce morality consistent with the Government's interpretation of Islam primarily, but not exclusively, within the public realm. Founded by King Abdul Aziz in 1926 in the Nejd region, the CPVPV gradually expanded, and in

1991 the General President of the CPVPV ordered the establishment of a branch of the Commission in each of the country's 13 provinces. The CPVPV reports to the King through the Council of Ministers. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) coordinates with, but does not have authority over, the CPVPV. Full-time or volunteer CPVPV field officers are known as mutawwi'in. They do not wear uniforms, but are required to wear identification badges and can only act in their official capacity when accompanied by a regular policeman. The 1980 law defined the CPVPV's mission as "guiding and advising people to observe the religious duties prescribed by Islamic Shari'a, and to preclude committing [acts] proscribed and prohibited [by Shari'a], or adopting bad habits and traditions or taboo [sic] heresies."

The 1980 law does not clearly define the CPVPV's jurisdiction, but the law's Executive Regulations state that the CPVPV is authorized to monitor various practices including public gender mixing and illegal private contact between men and women; practicing or displaying non-Muslim faiths or disrespecting Islam; displaying or selling media contrary to Islam, including pornography; producing, distributing, or consuming alcohol; venerating places or celebrating events inconsistent with approved Islamic practices; practicing sorcery or magic for profit; and committing or facilitating lewdness, including adultery, homosexuality, and gambling.

According to an October 25, 2008, article in the English language daily *Arab News*, the CPVPV has more than 5,000 staff members, including 3,557 CPVPV field officers throughout all 13 provinces. In a February 16, 2008, interview with the English language daily *Saudi Gazette*, the CPVPV President stated that all new staff members served a one-year probationary period before they were allowed to work in the field. A study reported in the November 3, 2007, *Saudi Gazette* stated that 44 percent of CPVPV members were college graduates and 79 percent were high school graduates. Reportedly, 4 percent had traveled abroad, 15 percent spoke only Arabic, and 23 percent were considering a career change.

In 2006 the Government declared that the CPVPV could no longer detain or interrogate suspects or violate the sanctity of private homes. A decree by Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin Abdulaziz Al Saud rolled back the previous year's prohibition on entering private homes but reaffirmed the need for the CPVPV to hand over any suspects to police for detention. Additionally, the CPVPV is not allowed to administer any kind of punishment, as the Commission's role ends with the arrest of the person. The press often criticized CPVPV activity.

The Government's stated policy is to permit private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious practice, and to address violations of this policy by government officials. However, the CPVPV sometimes did not respect this policy. Individuals whose ability to worship privately had been infringed could address their grievances through the MOI, the government's official Human Rights Commission (HRC), the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR, a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization), and when appropriate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The HRC and NSHR reported that they received and acted on complaints against the CPVPV. The Government made no information available on the number of complaints filed against the CPVPV during the reporting period or the official response to these complaints.

The Government also stated a policy that religious materials for private personal use are allowed in the country, and customs officials and the CPVPV do not have the authority to confiscate personal religious materials. Furthermore, the Government's stated policy for its diplomatic and consular missions abroad is to inform foreign workers applying for visas that they have the right to worship privately and possess personal religious materials, and to provide the name of the appropriate offices where grievances can be filed. During the reporting period, there was no evidence the Government consistently carried out this policy, either orally or in writing, and there were no reports of any grievances filed by such workers.

The MOIA was established in 1993 as a bridge between the Government and religious leadership. The MOIA supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of most Sunni mosques; however, approximately 30 percent of Sunni mosques were built and endowed by private persons, either as acts of charity or at private residences. Shi'a mosques do not receive MOIA support and instead rely on private contributions, which can vary widely, depending on the number and generosity of the congregants they serve. Unlike for Sunni mosques, the process for obtaining a government-required license for a Shi'a mosque is reportedly unclear and arbitrary.

The MOIA employs approximately 78,000 persons, including 50,000 Sunni imams and khateeb (Friday sermon leaders), who are chosen by their communities and approved by the Government. Based on the size of their communities, the imams receive monthly MOIA stipends ranging from \$500 to \$800 (1,875 to 3,000 riyals). Khateeb who deliver Friday prayers receive an additional monthly stipend of \$425. These stipends are low compared to other civil service salaries; however, the stipends are considered supplemental, rather than a primary source of personal

income. Most clerics have private businesses or full-time government jobs. Shi'a clerics are not funded by the MOIA and instead rely on community contributions, which can vary widely, depending on the number of congregants they serve. Some private mosques employ clerics of other nationalities.

A MOIA committee defines the qualifications of Sunni clerics, and the MOIA is responsible for investigating complaints against clerics for promoting intolerance, violence, or hatred. The Government's policy, although it is not always followed, is to advise clerics in tolerance and moderation, particularly those who issue intolerant fatwas or promote intolerance, violence, or hatred. In 2003 the MOIA created a program to monitor all government-paid clerics. Provincial committees of senior religious scholars supervise full-time MOIA employees who monitor all mosques and clerics. Based on their reports, the committees summon clerics accused of preaching intolerance. If the provincial committees are not able to dissuade these clerics from their thinking, the clerics are referred to a central committee. MOIA officials state that 1,300 clerics were dismissed during the first phase of this program, from 2003 to 2006. The second three-year phase will end in 2009. On March 25, 2009, the Minister for Islamic Affairs told *Okaz Online* that over the five years since the program's inception, 3,200 clerics have been dismissed.

The HRC was created to address human rights abuses and promote human rights within the country. The 24-member HRC board, which does not include women, was established in December 2006. Two HRC board members appointed in 2007 are Shi'a and Sulaimaniya Isma'ili Shi'a, respectively. The HRC reported that it received a variety of complaints of human rights violations, including infractions by the CPVPV and detentions and arrests of religious leaders and human rights activists. The HRC also has a mandate to improve human rights awareness in the country, including the promotion of tolerance. In this endeavor, the HRC worked with the Ministry of Education and provided materials and training to police, security forces, and the CPVPV on protecting human rights. The King issued a decree that ministries must respond to complaints filed by the HRC within three weeks.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Public religious practice was generally limited to activities that conform to the official interpretation of Islam. Contrary practices, such as celebrating Maulid Al-Nabi (birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, are forbidden, although enforcement was more relaxed in some

communities than in others. The Government also prohibited the public propagation of Islamic teachings that differ from the official interpretation of Islam.

During the reporting period, there was significant public discussion, including in the media, questioning the official version of religious traditions and criticizing their enforcement, although discussion of sensitive religious issues such as sectarian differences remained limited, and criticism of Islam was forbidden. Individuals who publicly criticized the official interpretation of Islam risked harassment, intimidation, detention, and deportation for foreigners. Journalists and activists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma risked detention, travel bans, and government shutdowns of their publications.

Sunni clerics, who receive government stipends, occasionally used anti-Jewish, anti-Christian, and anti-Shi'a language in their sermons. This language has decreased in frequency since the Government began encouraging moderation following a series of domestic terror attacks in 2003, but instances continued in which mosque speakers prayed for the death of Jews and Christians, including at the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. The MOIA dismissed some clerics for espousing intolerant ideas, but other clerics who said such things were allowed to continue. It was common for preachers in mosques, including the mosques of Mecca and Medina, to end Friday sermons with a prayer for the well-being of Muslims and for the humiliation of polytheism and polytheists.

The Government restricted the establishment of places of worship and public training of non-Sunni clergy. The Government officially did not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country to conduct religious services, although some did so under other auspices, and the Government generally allowed them to perform discreet religious functions. Such restrictions made it difficult for non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergy, particularly Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, whose faiths require a priest on a regular basis to receive sacraments. However, many non-Muslims continued to gather for private worship.

The Government required noncitizen legal residents to carry an identity card containing a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim." There were unconfirmed reports that some CPVPV members pressured sponsors and employers not to renew the residency cards of non-Muslims they had sponsored for employment if it was discovered or suspected that those individuals had led,

sponsored, or participated in private non-Muslim worship services. Similarly, there were reports that CPVPV members pressured employers and sponsors to reach verbal agreements with non-Muslim employees that they would not participate in private non-Muslim worship services.

During the reporting period, Shi'a continued to face systematic discrimination and intolerance tied to a variety of factors, including historical perceptions and ongoing suspicions of foreign influences on their actions. Nevertheless, most Shi'a were loyal to the Government and actively tried to contribute to society. While they coexisted with their Sunni neighbors in relative peace, most Shi'a shared general concerns about discrimination in education, employment, political representation, the judiciary, religious practice, and media.

In higher education, the Government discriminated against Shi'a in the selection process for students, professors, and administrators at public universities. For example, it was estimated that Shi'a constituted 2 percent of professors at a leading university in al-Ahsa, an area with a population that is at least 50 percent Shi'a. At the primary and secondary levels of education in al-Ahsa, there continued to be severe underrepresentation of Shi'a among school principals, with approximately 1 percent of area principals Shi'a, and none in al-Ahsa female schools. In Qatif, where Shi'a comprise approximately 90 percent of the population, many male principals and even some male religious teachers in primary schools were Shi'a; however, there were no Shi'a principals or religious teachers in Qatif's public female primary schools. There are no private schools for girls in Qatif, and the Ministry of Education did not grant requests to open such schools.

There were reports that Shi'a students experienced intolerance within the primary and secondary school systems. Some religious education teachers told their students that Shi'a practices were un-Islamic and that Shi'a students must follow Sunni traditions to be true Muslims. Other teachers told their students that Shi'a were not Muslims, but rather unbelievers, rejectionists, infidels, or polytheists. Despite stated government policy to the contrary, these teachers were not reprimanded, although in some cases they were transferred to other schools. In addition, there were reports that some public schools routinely punished Shi'a students academically for absence during Shi'a holidays the Government does not recognize, and there continued to be reports of prejudicial questions on exams.

Regardless of their personal religious traditions, public school students at all levels receive a mandatory religious instruction based on the Government's interpretation of Islam. Students in private international schools were not required to study

Islam. Muslim students of other nationalities must obtain a waiver from the MOE to attend private international schools, but obtaining the waiver is rarely a problem. Private religious schools not based on the official interpretation of Islam were not permitted. Despite some government revisions to elementary and secondary education textbooks, they retained language intolerant of other religious traditions, especially Jewish, Christian, and Shi'a beliefs. At the end of the reporting period, the Government's review of intolerant language in government textbooks was incomplete.

Shi'a faced considerable employment discrimination in the public and private sector. A very small number of Shi'a occupied high-level positions in government-owned companies and government agencies. Many Shi'a believed that openly identifying themselves as Shi'a would have a negative impact on career advancement. There was no formal policy concerning the hiring and promotion of Shi'a, but anecdotal evidence suggested that in some companies, including the oil and petrochemical industries, a "glass ceiling" existed and well-qualified Shi'a were passed over for less qualified Sunni colleagues. In the public sector, Shi'a were significantly underrepresented in national security-related positions, including the Ministry of Defense and Aviation, the National Guard, and the MOI. Shi'a were better represented in the ranks of traffic police, municipalities, and public schools in predominantly Shi'a areas. Qatif community leaders described allegedly prejudicial zoning laws that prevent construction of buildings over a certain height in various Shi'a neighborhoods. The leaders claimed the laws prevented investment and development in these areas and aimed to limit the density of Shi'a population in any given area.

Members of the Shi'a minority were also subjected to political discrimination tacitly approved by the Government. For example, although Shi'a comprise approximately 10 to 15 percent of the citizen population and approximately one-third to one-half of the Eastern Province population, they were underrepresented in senior government positions. There were no Shi'a ministers, deputy ministers, governors, deputy governors, or ministry branch directors in the Eastern Province, and only three of the 59 government-appointed municipal council members were Shi'a. However, the Shi'a were well-represented among the elected members of the municipal councils, as they held 10 of 11 seats on the Qatif and al-Ahsa councils. An elected Shi'a headed the Qatif municipal council. On February 14, 2009, the King appointed 81 new members to the Consultative Council. Although the number of Shi'a members was increased from three to five, their overall proportional representation on the Council remains approximately 3 percent.

Judicial discrimination against Shi'a was evident during the reporting period. Shi'a courts' powers are limited by the fact that any litigant who disagrees with a ruling can seek a new decision from a Sunni court. Sunni court rulings can void Shi'a court rulings and government departments can choose not to implement judgments rendered by Shi'a judges. Shi'a leaders argue that the one Court of Appeals on which Shi'a judges sit has no real authority and only verifies documents. Jurisdictionally, these courts are only allowed to rule on cases in the Qatif and al-Ahsa areas; Shi'a from other regions cannot use such courts. Due to the Shi'a courts' lack of authority, six of their seven judges threatened to resign in September 2007, but no action was taken by the Government or the judges. On April 13, 2008, the Government unexpectedly replaced Sheikh Mohammad Al-Obaidan, the senior of the two Shi'a court judges in Qatif. Although there was no official reason given for replacing Sheikh Al-Obaidan, he had been critical of the Government for giving only limited resources and authority to the Ja'fari courts. The perceived arbitrary nature of this action caused an outcry in the Shi'a community.

Many Shi'a were also subjected to systematic religious discrimination. For example, in addition to the fact that the Government does not finance construction or maintenance of Shi'a mosques, Shi'a who wished to build a new mosque were required to obtain the permission of the MOIA, the local municipality, and the provincial government, which is functionally part of the MOI. Constructing Sunni mosques did not require approval from the Government. The Government approved construction of new Shi'a mosques in Qatif and some areas of al-Ahsa, sometimes after lengthy delays due to the numerous approvals required, but did not approve construction of Shi'a mosques in Dammam, home to many Shi'a. Shi'a leaders attributed the refusals to a government desire to discourage the growth of Shi'a populations in these communities. In addition, on May 22, 2008, *Al-Rasid*, a privately owned Shi'a website, reported that al-Ahsa municipal authorities halted construction of the Imam Rida mosque, the largest Shi'a mosque in al-Ahsa, on orders of the local government, due to building code violations; no further explanation was provided.

During the reporting period, at least three Shi'a waqfs (places of prayer in individuals' homes sanctioned by local Shi'a clerics as a suitable alternative to traditional mosques) were closed in al-Khobar. The provincial government reportedly carried out the closures by arresting and threatening to arrest mosque owners and/or clerics if they continued to hold prayers and by posting police near the mosque. Local authorities reportedly told mosque owners that the closures were due to improper zoning and lack of appropriate permits.

Shi'a mosques in mixed neighborhoods were reportedly required to recite the Sunni call to prayer, which is distinct from the Shi'a call, at prayer times. Moreover, although Shi'a combine two of the five daily Sunni prayers, Shi'a businessmen were often forced to close their shops during all five prayer times, in accordance with the country's official Sunni practices.

The Government does not officially recognize several centers of Shi'a religious instruction located in Eastern Province, provide financial support to them, recognize certificates of educational attainment for their graduates, or provide employment for their graduates, all of which it does for Sunni religious training institutions. These centers were also subject to forced closures without explanation. Authorities closed a women's center on Tarut Island in the Qatif area in early June 2008. Public religious training for non-Sunni religious groups is prohibited.

The Government refused to approve construction or registration of Shi'a community centers. Shi'a were forced to build areas in private homes to serve as community centers. These community centers sometimes did not meet safety codes, and the lack of legal recognition made their long-term financing and continuity considerably more difficult.

While authorities allowed Shi'a in the Eastern Province city of Qatif greater freedom in their religious practices, in other areas with large Shi'a populations, such as al-Ahsa and Dammam, authorities continued to restrict Shi'a religious activities. The Government imposed restrictions on public observances of Ashura (commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussayn ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) in al-Ahsa, Dammam, and other mixed areas where Shi'a and Sunni live, banning public marches, loudspeaker broadcasts of clerics' lectures from Shi'a community centers, and, in some instances, gatherings within those centers.

Moreover, the Government continued to exclude Shi'a perspectives from the state's extensive religious media and broadcast programming. The Government sporadically imposed bans on the importation and sale of Shi'a books and audiovisual products. The Government also blocked access to some websites with religious content it considered offensive or sensitive, including the *Al-Rasid* website, in line with a broader official policy of censoring objectionable content including political discourse and illicit materials. In addition, terms like "rejectionists," which are insulting to Shi'a, are commonly found in public discourse and can be found on the MOIA website.

The Medina Shi'a are a small, deeply rooted community of diverse believers including the Nakhawala, who are laborers by tradition. Nakhawala community leaders claim they face more issues than Shi'a Twelvers in the Eastern Province because they are not allowed to construct mosques, women's centers, or community centers, nor do they have access to Shi'a courts. They also claim to hear anti-Shi'a sermons and statements regularly in their neighborhoods. Unlike in the Eastern Province, there are no prominent Nakhawala Shi'a in government bodies such as the Consultative Council or the Human Rights Commission. In addition, the Nakhawala aver that their surname ("al Nakhly," which roughly translates as "farmers" and identifies their minority status and sect) facilitates systematic discrimination against them in employment and education.

The Sulaimaniya Isma'ili community continued to face obstacles in Najran Province. Community leaders asserted that the Government discriminated against them by prohibiting them from having their own religious books; allowing Sunni religious leaders to declare them unbelievers; denying them government employment, restricting them to lower-level jobs; and relocating them from the southwest to other parts of the country, or encouraging them to emigrate. Relations between the Isma'ilis and the Government improved markedly, however, since the King appointed a new provincial governor in Najran in February 2009.

Since the Government's interpretation of Islam holds that veneration of humans, including the Prophet Muhammad, is idolatrous, public celebration of *Maulid Al-Nabi* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and certain ritual acts at places associated with the Prophet and his family in Medina and Mecca are officially forbidden. Shi'a described restrictions on their visits to Mecca and Medina as the interference of Riyadh-based authorities in private Muslim worship. In addition, government religious authorities continued the practice of destroying ancient Islamic historical sites for fear that Muslims would pray to the persons the sites represented

The CPVPV continued to launch public outreach campaigns targeting the "dangers of sorcery and witchcraft." In December 2008 the CPVPV prepared an exhibition in Jizan Province aimed at primary and secondary school students. The exhibit includes writings, herbs, and insects used in practices the CPVPV consider un-Islamic. In May 2009, the CPVPV announced it had approved a new national strategy for combating sorcery in the Kingdom.

The CPVPV continued to monitor Valentine's Day, New Year celebrations, and even the Janadriya Heritage Festival, the government-sanctioned celebration of culture and traditions. Media reported that, as in years past, the CPVPV warned shopkeepers not to sell Valentine's Day or New Year items.

Abuses of Freedom of Religion

The Government continued to commit abuses of religious freedom. There were a few high-profile death penalty cases involving alleged witchcraft. Non-Muslim groups in different parts of the country were detained and harassed for worshipping privately. Harassment of Shi'a during religious worship and communal gatherings continued. Religious leaders and activists continued to face obstacles for expressing their views against the religious establishment. In addition, senior clerics continued to use their pulpits to disseminate intolerant views. For example, a sheikh who was named to lead extra Ramadan prayers at the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 2008, a prestigious appointment, classified Shi'a clerics as "infidels" in two separate interviews with the BBC in May and June of 2009. This sheikh also opined that Shi'a clerics are not entitled to join the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, the highest religious body in the country.

Although the Government's stated policy is that persons are free to practice their faith in private, the Government continued to prohibit public, non-Muslim religious activities, and non-Sunni activities in dominantly Sunni areas. Many of the reported abuses were difficult to corroborate, however, because of witnesses' or victims' fears that disclosing such information might harm themselves or others. Moreover, information regarding government practices was generally incomplete because judicial proceedings usually were closed to the public, despite provisions in the 2002 Criminal Procedure Law that require court proceedings to be open. Many non-Sunnis worshiped in secret because of continuing fear of harassment, intimidation, detention, or deportation by police or the CPVPV.

CPVPV members, when accompanied by police officers, have the authority to confront individuals who violate social standards, but the Government also requires CPVPV members to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner. Individual CPVPV members often failed to comply with these requirements. The CPVPV harassed women, especially foreign Muslim women, for failure to observe strict dress codes, particularly failure to wear headscarves. Moreover, some provincial authorities in the provinces of Mecca and al-Jawf took a more active role in encouraging the CPVPV to enforce traditional standards of appearance on younger citizens.

Due to a number of high-profile CPVPV cases, the reporting period saw increased public discussion of the nature of khulwa, a private get-together of an unrelated man and woman, versus ikhtilat, or public mixing of men and women. Shari'a prohibits khulwa, but public mixing is not illegal, although Saudi social standards discourage it. Since there were no defined rules for what constitutes these activities, CPVPV members were free to impose their individual interpretations on situations they encountered. Some CPVPV members incorrectly accused couples interacting in public of khulwa, often leading to harassment or more serious consequences, although the number of such incidents was fewer than in previous reporting periods.

An unknown number of detainees were held in prison on charges of sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft; there were a few media reports each week of persons detained or arrested on charges of sorcery, black magic, or witchcraft. Anti-sorcery departments exist within the CPVPV branches across the country, with responsibility to investigate and report incidents of "sorcery" to local police. From media reports it appeared that some accused sorcerers were charlatans or quacks but others, mainly Africans, appeared to be engaged in traditional spiritual or healing practices.

On May 24, 2009, police in Khobar arrested Hajj Abdullah Saleh Al-Muhanna, a Shi'a, for leading prayer services in his home. Over the previous year, authorities had carried out a campaign of harassment against Al-Muhanna. Without facing trial, al-Muhanna was released from prison on June 30, 2009.

On May 18, 2009, Rasid.com, a Shiite blog, reported the arrest of prominent religious figure Sheikh Ali Hussein Al-Amar for collecting money and spending it on hussainyat (Shi'a places of worship). Sources indicated that the arrest was a direct order by Al-Isha Governor Bader bin Jalawi.

On March 28, 2009, Hamoud Saleh Al-Amri was released from prison on the condition that he not travel outside the country or appear in the media. On January 13, 2009, Al-Amri was arrested for discussing his Christian faith on his blog. The case received international attention and advocacy groups such as the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) campaigned for Al-Amri's release. The country's penalty for apostasy is death, although in recent years there have been no known cases of citizens or non-citizen Muslims convicted and sentenced to capital punishment for the offense. This was the third time Hamoud

had been detained; he was held for nine months in 2004 and for one month in 2008.

On March 24, 2009, CPVPV members in Mecca attempted to question a woman who was in a car with an unrelated male. The woman fled into a women's job training center, supposedly off limits to males. However, the CPVPV members entered the facility and eyewitnesses reportedly saw them "dragging a woman by her hair down the stairs of the building." Eyewitnesses filed complaints, as men are not allowed to enter all-female facilities; the CPVPV stated later they were investigating the incident, but issued no public report by the end of the reporting period.

On March 13, 2009, a Shi'a cleric from Awamiya Village in Qatif gave a controversial sermon wherein he raised the possibility of a separate Shi'a state. Following this sermon, the cleric reportedly went into hiding to avoid arrest. On March 19, 2009, several hundred Shi'a conducted a sit-in protest in Awamiya in support of the cleric; reports indicated more than a dozen Shi'a were arrested. At the end of the reporting period, some of those detained were still in custody.

On February 20, 2009, a group of Shi'a trying to visit the Baqi'a cemetery in Medina clashed with police and the CPVPV. Licensed media outlets in the country did not report on this incident; however, the international press and blogs in the country widely covered the sectarian tension that followed. Several religious and political leaders from the Shi'a community wrote open letters to the King calling for the release of Shi'a youth who had been detained as a result of the Baqi'a incident. Eventually, a delegation of Shi'a from Qatif, al-Ahsa, and Medina met with the King, after which the King announced the immediate release of all detainees.

On January 29, 2009, Sabri Bogday, a Turkish barber, returned to Turkey after the King pardoned him. On March 31, 2008, Bogday was sentenced to death after two men reported to authorities that he blasphemed God and the Prophet Muhammad in his barber shop. On May 1, 2008, an appellate court upheld his conviction of blasphemy, necessitating the pardon.

On January 28, 2009, Yemane Gebriel, an Eritrean pastor, fled the country to an undisclosed location after multiple threats from the CPVPV. Gebriel had led a church of more than 300 foreign-born Christians for the past 10 years. In 2005, Gebriel was arrested and released a few weeks later due to diplomatic efforts on his behalf.

On January 12, 2009, Rasid.com reported that students and government employees who missed school or work on a Shi'a holiday, the Tenth of Muharram, without an acceptable excuse were "punished." The nature of the punishment was not specified.

On November 8, 2008, *Shams Daily* reported that the CPVPV in the Eastern Province denied Internet reports that it had forcibly arrested blogger and poet Rushide Al-Dowsary for promoting witchcraft and sorcery.

In October 2008 police issued deportation orders to the sponsors of a group of 14 Indian Christians living in Makkah Province. On April 25, 2008, the same group of Christians had been imprisoned for 24 hours. Following this incident, officials made three separate attempts to deport them, including the October 2008 orders, and each time higher authorities intervened to rescind the orders on their behalf. No further harassment was reported after the October 2008 deportation orders were rescinded.

On August 23, 2008, Rasid.com reported that authorities arrested Shiite religious figure and reformer Sheikh Nemer Baqer Al-Nemer after a series of declarations in which he demanded religious freedom reforms. He was released from prison less than 24 hours after his arrest. The website Al-Sahat stated a royal order secured his release.

On August 12, 2008, Okhdood.com and Gulfnews.com reported that a member of the CPVPV in the Eastern Province murdered his sister after confirming she had converted to Christianity. She had reportedly revealed the story of her conversion on a website posting. The story was picked up and widely reported by other Internet news outlets, some of which provided additional detail, including that she wrote about her family's hostility toward her after heated discussions about her new faith. There was one report that government authorities detained the killer and were investigating this as an honor killing. At the end of the reporting period, no further information was available.

Sulaimaniya Isma'ili activist Ahmad Turki al-Saab remained in detention at the end of the reporting period. Al-Saab had organized a petition campaign demanding the removal from office of Najran's governor for alleged discrimination against the minority Shi'a community. On April 26, 2008, he presented the petition personally to the King; al-Saab was subsequently summoned from Najran Province to the capital and detained on May 13, 2008.

On April 26, 2008, prominent Isma'ili activists presented a petition to the King calling for the release of 17 Sulaimaniya Isma'ili Shi'a jailed after riots in Najran Province in 2000 who remained imprisoned at the end of the reporting period. There was no official response. The Government asserted the men were arrested and imprisoned ostensibly for disturbing public order and threatening the safety of the Najran governor, and not for religious reasons.

In April 2008 an Indian Christian residing in the Western Province reported that his sponsor began receiving daily phone calls from local authorities demanding the Christian's immediate deportation on the basis of a previous MOI order. The Christian was one of 28 Indians arrested in a December 2003 CPVPV raid on a private religious gathering. Due to sponsor intervention, the subject and his family remained in the country, while the other 27 Indian Christians were deported. Responding to local authorities' pressure, the sponsor obtained an exit visa for the Christians with a departure date of May 31, 2008. Intervention by senior government officials led local authorities to contact the sponsor on May 16, 2008, and inform him the exit visa was cancelled pending a review. As of the end of the reporting period, the subject and his family remained in the country and experienced no further harassment from the local authorities.

On February 13, 2008, Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a public letter to the King requesting that he halt the execution of Fawza Falih Muhammad Ali for witchcraft. Arrested by CPVPV in May 2005, she was sentenced to death in April 2006 for allegedly bewitching a man in Quraiyat. There was reportedly weak evidence and the court procedures were highly irregular. In September 2006 an appeals court reversed the trial court's ruling due to insufficient evidence and remanded the case to the trial court. According to HRW, the trial court reinstated the death sentence against her on a "discretionary" basis in the "public interest" to "protect the creed, souls, and property of this country." Her case was transferred to the Royal Court in January 2008. At the end of the reporting period, she remained imprisoned.

On February 9, 2008, Human Rights First, an independent, unlicensed non-governmental organization (NGO), published a petition with 115 signatures asking the King to free Sulaimaniya Isma'ili Shi'a Hadi Al-Mutif, who has been in prison for more than 16 years under a death sentence for "insulting the Prophet Muhammad." Reportedly the sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment, but Al-Mutif's advocates are seeking a royal pardon. The King has refused to intervene due to the claim that Al-Mutif's alleged offense was a hadd crime,

referring to a crime whose explanation and punishment are explicitly described in the Qur'an and thus not subject to civil authority. If the sentence were to be rescinded and re-issued under ta'azir (punishment determined by a judge), the King could pardon him. NGOs reported that Al-Mutif has been in solitary confinement for more than a year, reportedly in response to two suicide attempts, and the Government has moved him to a second prison. When his father died in April 2007, he was not allowed to attend the funeral. The Supreme Judicial Council decided not to take up Al-Mutif's case. At the end of the reporting period, the HRC had taken up his case, although Al-Mutif remained in prison.

The 2008 sentencing of four Sulaimaniya Isma'ili activists to 80 lashes and up to two months' imprisonment on charges of consuming alcohol was under appeal.

The November 2007 case filed by a Sunni man requesting compensation from the Government for imprisoning him from December 2006 to April 2007 remained under review. He claimed he was jailed on the basis of his Internet articles advocating human rights, including religious freedom for Shi'a, and his meeting with a prominent Shi'a leader. He also claimed government officials harassed him and his family members before and after his imprisonment. At the end of the reporting period, the case was still under review by the Dammam branch of the Board of Grievances, a government ombudsman.

In September 2007 a Uighur Muslim from China was detained in a Mecca prison awaiting forcible return to China. He was allegedly involved in underground religious activities, including teaching the Qur'an, in China. There have been credible reports that the government of China denies due process to, tortures, and in some cases executes Uighur Muslims who have advocated for religious freedom and who have been forcibly returned. Senior U.S. Embassy and U.S. Consulate Jeddah officers met with government officials and requested government intervention to prevent his forcible return.

On August 18, 2007, *Okaz* reported that four government departments were investigating the death of a Bangladeshi laborer after CPVPV members arrested him for washing cars at prayer time in Medina. The Governor of Medina, Prince Abdulaziz bin Majid, reportedly ordered the investigation. No additional information was available at the end of the reporting period.

On May 23, 2007, Salman Al-Huraisi, a security guard, died in a CPVPV office in Riyadh. According to his father and brother, at least 18 CPVPV members raided their home in Riyadh on suspicion of alcohol production, and then arrested 10

family members. Al-Huraisi died as a result of an alleged beating at the hands of the CPVPV. Two CPVPV were charged and acquitted at trial. On March 18, 2008, *Arab News* reported that the Court of Cassation in Riyadh overturned the acquittals and returned the case to the Riyadh General Court for a retrial. On May 14, 2008, Al-Hayat reported that the Riyadh General Court upheld its November 27, 2007, verdict. On June 12, 2008, *Arab News* reported the family appealed the case yet again.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government implemented certain policies that made some improvements in the status of religious freedom. It announced additional policies that, if carried out, would continue progress. Moreover, the King and other government and religious leaders called for interfaith dialogue and national dialogue to promote tolerance and moderation.

Improvements included limited education reform, better protection of the right to possess and use personal religious materials, augmented efforts to curb and investigate harassment by the CPVPV, increased media coverage and criticism of the CPVPV, somewhat greater authority and capacity for official human rights entities to operate, and measures to combat extremist ideology.

In addition to the King's Interfaith Dialogue Initiative, the King continued his national dialogue campaign to increase tolerance and encourage moderation and understanding. The King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue had more than 1,200 certified trainers who conducted 2,677 training programs and workshops on "the culture and importance of open dialogue and communication skills" for more than 150,000 men and women. During the reporting period, a mix of high-level government and religious officials openly supported this campaign. They advocated against religious extremism and intolerant language, especially in mosques and schools.

There were fewer reports of government officials confiscating religious materials and no reports that customs officials confiscated religious materials from travelers,

whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Individuals were able to bring personal Bibles, crosses, DVDs of sermons, and other religious materials into the country without difficulty.

In response to continuing concerns about the CPVPV, the Government allowed unprecedented media coverage of the trials of CPVPV members allegedly involved in the harassment and deaths of citizens. There was greater freedom to criticize openly the religious establishment, including in the press, and many writers denounced abuses the CPVPV committed, some calling for a nationwide examination of the CPVPV's role or even its disbandment. In the past such criticism often resulted in harassment by the CPVPV and generated death threats from religious extremists, but there were no similar reports during the reporting period.

Public discussions and challenges to the role of the CPVPV in monitoring social interactions under their religious mandate increased in number and intensity, especially among younger citizens, given that 70 percent of the population is under age 30. In particular, some younger females continued to demonstrate eagerness to expand restrictive social and legal boundaries.

The CPVPV devised additional training sessions and courses for its employees on the laws and procedures applying to their "field work," and on ways of dealing with and advising the public. These university-level courses were held at institutions such as the King Fahd Security College, the Diplomatic Institute, and Om al-Qura University in Makkah. More than 3,100 CPVPV members attended training programs, a 48percent increase over the previous reporting period.

In February 2007 the Government authorized \$2.4 billion dollars (nine billion riyals) to support a six-year implementation of a pilot program in educational modernization. One of the chief goals of the program is to supplement traditional religious instruction with more "knowledge-based" subject matter such as science and computer literacy. At the end of the reporting period, more than 83 school districts in more than 27 different regions and provinces were participating in the project, which included highly structured retraining of teachers on the new curriculum. The new Minister of Education publicly and privately supported rapid implementation of the program. Additionally, the Ministry of Education (MOE) signed a five-year collaboration agreement with the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue to promote religious and cultural tolerance in the classroom through teacher training programs and seminars.

Although a comprehensive review of the country's textbooks was incomplete at the end of the reporting period, the Government continued to address and remove intolerant and extreme language while promoting tolerance and interfaith and intercultural understanding in textbooks. The Government mandated that certain references to controversial terms such as jihad and "emancipation from non-Muslims" be removed from textbooks. Instead, verses stating that "Muslims should not force others to embrace Islam" and "There is no compulsion in religion" were placed in textbooks. In addition, MOE officials continued to monitor teachers for intolerant and extreme language.

Unprecedented media criticism of government educational materials took place during the reporting period. On November 25, 2008, Al-Hayat ran a full-page interview with a King Abdulaziz University professor who strongly criticized religious textbooks. On February 17, 2009, Mohamed Abdul Latif Al-Shaikh, a writer for Al-Jazeera, criticized the education system. He called for reforms of the history, religion, and Arabic literature curricula, and criticized incompetent teachers.

The NSHR continued to receive and respond to complaints concerning transgressions by CPVPV members. On April 3, 2009, *Al-Madinah Arabic Daily* reported that the new president of the CPVPV, Abdul Aziz Al-Humain, fired three of his officials for violating regulations. At the end of the reporting period NSHR was developing a new human rights curriculum for schools, investigating other Arab countries' experiences in promoting respect for human rights, and advising the Government on how to introduce in school curricula concepts of human rights and a culture of respect for others. The NSHR continued to call for modification of the CPVPV's authority.

The MOIA continued to monitor education materials used at religious summer camps, to prevent teaching of extremist ideologies to children. In 2008 Prince Khalid Al Faisal, the Governor of Mecca Region, cancelled all religious summer camps in Jeddah and Mecca after determining they were spreading intolerant ideas to school children.

Local authorities continued to permit an incrementally greater degree of freedom to Shi'a in Qatif during the reporting period, allowing religious practices and gatherings that were restricted or prevented in the past. The number and size of Karbala plays reenacting the martyrdom of Imam Hussain grew. Pictures of revered imams were displayed openly in shop windows.

On June 6, 2009, local papers reported that the Council of Senior Religious Scholars issued a fatwa permitting non-Muslims to be buried alongside Muslims. The fatwa resulted from a 2007 gas pipeline fire at al-Hawiya that killed 34 persons of Asian nationalities and a number of citizens. Most of the victims could not be identified as Muslim or non-Muslim for burial. It was not clear whether this fatwa applied only to this particular case, or whether it provided a wider precedent.

On February 14, 2009, the King dismissed two powerful religious officials, the head of the CPVPV, Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ghaith, and the country's most senior judge, Sheikh Salih Ibn Al-Luhaydan. Sheikh Al-Luhaydan caused controversy in September 2008 when he stated it was permissible to kill owners of satellite TV channels that broadcast immoral programs.

On the same day, the King removed the governor of Najran, Prince Mishal bin Saud Al-Saud, after years of troubled relations with the Isma'ili community, and appointed his own son, Prince Mishal bin Abdullah, as the new governor of Najran. Governor Mishal reached out to improve relations with the Isma'ili community. He distributed 460 square miles of land to the Najranis as a "personal gift of his Majesty."

On July 23, 2008, Princess Al Johara bint Fahd, President of Riyadh University for Girls, announced a six-week summer training program for female students in English, marketing, communications, and computer programming, thus providing new options to religious camps. The four-year program plans to train more than 40,000 female students.

On November 6, 2007, local and international papers reported on the meeting between the King and Pope Benedict XVI in Rome, discussing interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and denouncing terrorism. This was the first meeting of a Saudi king with the Pope and it was reportedly set up at the request of the Saudis. On March 22, 2008, BBC News reported that Archbishop Paul Mounded Al-Hachem, a senior Middle East representative of the Pope, said the Vatican was holding talks with the Government on building churches in the Kingdom. Al-Hachem said discussions began a few weeks earlier. At the end of the reporting period there were no plans in place to build any churches inside the Kingdom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In addition to the religious basis on which the Government claims its authority and the significant role the country's religious leadership plays in the Kingdom, the

culture also exerts intense pressure on the population to conform to socio-religious norms. As a result, a majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law, although there were differing views as to how this should be realized in practice.

Discrimination based on religion was a factor in mistreatment of foreign workers by citizen employers and coworkers. There were reports that some employers withheld pay or residency card renewal based on religious factors.

Religious vigilantes unaffiliated with the CPVPV and acting on their own sometimes harassed and assaulted citizens and foreigners.

On May 3, 2008, the Al-Toomar website reported that Amin Al-Bedawy, a Shi'a lawyer, filed a lawsuit in a Dubai court against the Al-Sahat website for publishing lies and distorting Shi'a beliefs. He reportedly filed an earlier lawsuit in a Dubai court on April 21, 2008, against the Saudi television channel Al-Majd for defaming Shi'ism.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. policy is to press the Government consistently to honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, promote tolerance toward non-Muslims, and combat extremism.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador met with senior government and religious leaders regarding religious freedom, and raised specific cases of violations with senior officials. Other senior U.S. officials discussed with the Government its policies concerning religious practice and tolerance. They encouraged the Government to honor policies to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology within the country and around the world, protect private worship for all religious groups, curb harassment of religious groups, and promote tolerance toward all religions. Senior U.S. officials supported provisions calling for religious tolerance, including elimination of discrimination against religious minorities, improved respect for human rights, and improved accountability and transparency in these matters. U.S. officials also raised specific cases and instances of religious freedom violations with senior government officials.

Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to enforce its public commitment to allow private religious practice and to respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the Government's official form of Sunni Islam. In addition, embassy officers met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials to discuss other matters pertaining to religious freedom. An official from the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom visited Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dhahran to promote U.S. views on religious freedom.

In January 2009 the U.S. Secretary of State re-designated Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for violations of religious freedom. In connection with this designation, the Secretary issued a waiver of sanctions "to further the purposes of the Act."

SENEGAL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 76,000 square miles and a population of 12.5 million. Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 94 percent of the population. Most citizens practice a syncretic form of Islam, combining Islamic practices with indigenous cultural beliefs and values. There also is an active Christian community (4 percent of the population) that includes Roman Catholics, Protestant denominations, and syncretistic Christian-animist groups. The remaining 2 percent practices exclusively indigenous religious beliefs or no religion.

The country is ethnically and religiously diverse. Although there is significant integration of all groups, Christians are concentrated in the west and south, while groups who practice indigenous religious beliefs live mainly in the east and south.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution specifically defines the country as a secular state and provides for the free practice of religious beliefs, provided that public order is maintained.

Unlike members of other religious groups, Muslims can choose Islam-based laws contained in the family code for marriage and inheritance. Civil court judges can preside over civil and customary law cases, but many disputes are turned over to religious leaders for adjudication, particularly in rural areas.

The Government provides direct financial and material assistance to religious organizations, primarily to maintain or rehabilitate places of worship or to underwrite special events. All religious groups have access to these funds, and there is often competition among religious groups to obtain them.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Tabaski, Tamkharit, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Korite, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Religious organizations are independent of the Government and administer their affairs without government interference. The civil and commercial codes require any group, religious or otherwise, to register with the Minister of the Interior in order to acquire legal status as an association. Registration enables an association to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, and receive financial contributions from private sources. Registered religious groups and registered nonprofit organizations are exempt from many forms of taxation. The Government generally grants registration, and the Minister of Interior must have a legal basis for refusing registration.

Religious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) obtain permission to operate from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Development. The Government monitors foreign religious NGOs to ensure that their activities adhere to their stated objectives.

The Government allows for four hours of religious education per week in state-owned elementary schools. The religion taught is based on demand from parents, whether Christian or Muslim. An estimated 700,000 students participated in these programs.

Private schools are free to provide religious education. The Ministry of Education provides funds to schools operated by religious institutions that meet national education standards. Christian schools, which have a long and successful

experience in education, received the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools are Muslims. Religious charities also received government support.

The Government also operates Islamic schools, which are growing in popularity and include an estimated 50,000 students. During the reporting period, eight new middle schools were opened in Louga, Matam, Kaffrine, Diourbel, and Kaolack; in addition, three other middle schools and one high school were under construction in these regions. The demand for such religious schools, which combine Arabic and French instruction, is very high. In 2008 citizens made requests for 600 new Islamic schools; however, the Government lacked the funding and capacity to fulfill the high demand.

The Government encourages and assists Muslim participation in the annual Hajj, providing hundreds of free plane tickets to citizens each year for the pilgrimage. The Government provides similar assistance for an annual Catholic pilgrimage to the Vatican.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Government provided facilities to ease access to the Saint-Lazarre cemetery in Dakar, resolving concerns expressed in March 2008 about its plan to expropriate part of the cemetery to erect office buildings.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Christian and Muslim leaders continued to maintain a public dialogue.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Through the Embassy's Speakers Program, International Visitor Leadership Program, calls to religious leaders, U.S. Government Program Alumni Association, editorials, digital video conferences, and other public outreach tools and events, the Embassy promoted religious pluralism and open dialogue between religious groups.

SERBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law places limits on religious practice by discriminating among religious groups and denies some groups legal status. There is no state religion, but the majority Serbian Orthodox Church and other "traditional" religious communities received some preferential consideration.

The Government's respect for religious freedom remained problematic because of the religion law and the Religion Ministry's arbitrary implementation of the law. Police investigations of acts of hate speech and vandalism tended to be slow and inconclusive. There continued to be isolated reports that officials made public, negative statements against minority religious groups.

There were fewer reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Leaders of minority religious communities reported acts of vandalism, hate speech, physical attacks, and negative media reports.

U.S. embassy representatives continued to advocate for changes in the laws on religion and restitution that would rectify the discriminatory aspects of the legislation. Embassy officials met with representatives of all religious groups and encouraged interfaith cooperation. Embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with members of the divided Islamic community and conducted outreach activities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 30,000 square miles and a population of 7.5 million. In the 2002 census, 95 percent of the population declared themselves followers of one of the seven "traditional" religious communities. Approximately 84 percent of citizens are Serbian Orthodox and 5 percent are Muslim. The Muslim community includes Slavic Muslims in Sandzak (a region lying along the borders with Montenegro and Kosovo), ethnic Albanians in the south, and Roma located throughout the country. Roman Catholics constitute 5 percent of the population and are predominantly ethnic Hungarians and Croats in Vojvodina. Protestants make up 1.5 percent of the population. The Jewish community consists of an estimated 3,000 persons.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the religion law discriminates among religious groups and requires minority groups, including those that were previously recognized, to reregister through an invasive and burdensome procedure to attain or retain their status as recognized religious groups. Many of the groups required to reregister had been recognized officially for more than 50 years and present in the country for as long as 150 years.

Throughout the reporting period, "nontraditional" religious communities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to advocate changing the law but did not put forth concrete proposals. During her April 2009 visit, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Asma Jahangir recommended that the procedures for registration of religious groups be simplified. The Religion Ministry characterized the law as symptomatic of a society in transition and focused its efforts on monitoring the law's implementation.

On April 24, 2009, the NGO Coalition for a Secular State called upon the Constitutional Court to rule on the group's request, submitted a year earlier, to determine whether certain provisions of the law violate constitutional guarantees for separation of church and state and equal treatment. At the end of the reporting period, the request was on the docket but had not been considered by the Constitutional Court.

There is no state religion; however, the law on religion recognizes seven "traditional" religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Islamic community, and Jewish community.

The Orthodox Church received preferential treatment. The Government continued to subsidize salaries for Serbian Orthodox clergy working in other countries.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Orthodox Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas. Employees of other confessions are entitled to time off in observance of their religious holidays, such as Catholic Christmas, Good Friday and Easter; Kurban and Ramadan Bajram; and Yom Kippur.

Although registration is not mandatory for religious communities, those who do not register encounter considerable difficulties when opening a bank account, purchasing or selling property, or publishing their literature. The property and tax laws grant property and value-added tax (VAT) exemptions only to registered communities; implementation of these laws allow registered communities to claim VAT refunds, including retroactively to January 1, 2005. A case challenging the tax law was pending in the Constitutional Court at the end of the reporting period.

Registration requirements include submission of members' names, identity numbers, and signatures; proof that the religious group has at least 100 members (0.001 percent of the population, including that of Kosovo); the group's statute and summary of its religious teachings, ceremonies, religious goals, and basic activities; and information on sources of funding. The law also provides that no religious community can be registered if its name includes part of the name of an existing registered group. For example, no group including the word "Orthodox" or "Evangelical" in its title may be registered, since those terms are found in the names of the "traditional" churches.

Students in primary and secondary schools are required to attend classes either on one of the seven "traditional" religious communities or on civic education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's respect for religious freedom remained problematic because of the religion law and the Religion Ministry's arbitrary implementation of the law. Minority religious groups reported confusion and irregularities after attempting to register with the Ministry, which at times failed to respond within the legal 60-day limit. Unlike in previous periods, there were no reports that the Ministry advised some groups that they should register as "citizen associations" with the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, which in turn advised the communities to register with the Ministry of Religion.

As of the end of the reporting period, there were 11 "nontraditional" religious communities registered. The Ministry of Religion continued to deny registration to the League of Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna Movement, Pentecostal Church, Protestant Evangelical Church of Leskovac, Protestant Evangelical Church of Subotica, and Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement. At the end of the reporting period, according to Supreme Court data, there were eight cases filed by six religious communities--the League of Baptists, Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement, Church of Christian Oath, Jehovah's Witnesses, Montenegrin

Orthodox Church, and Protestant Evangelical Church of Leskovac--pending before the Supreme Court appealing the Ministry's decision to deny registration. The League of Baptists and the Evangelical Church of Leskovac also had cases pending before the Constitutional Court.

Two appeals filed by Jehovah's Witnesses contesting the Ministry's refusal to register the group remained pending before the Supreme Court and the European Court of Human Rights at the end of the reporting period. In May 2008 the Supreme Court rejected the two complaints due to technical insufficiencies in one of the complaints. Lawyers for Jehovah's Witnesses appealed to the Supreme Court to rule on the merits of its second complaint on the grounds that the technical error did not apply to that case.

In October 2008 Jehovah's Witnesses filed a third request for registration with the Religion Ministry. On December 30, 2008, the Ministry denied the request, citing the group's proselytizing activities and blood transfusion policy. Ministry representatives also underlined the necessity of waiting for the Supreme Court to rule on the group's previous appeal before taking a decision on registering the group. On January 29, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal of the December 2008 denial with the Supreme Court; the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Although the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches were not registered, they were recognized by the Government and operated freely. However, the Government has not recognized other Orthodox churches, despite attempts by the Macedonian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches to gain recognition. Religion ministry officials stated in the past that the groups could not be registered because "Orthodox" is included in the name of a previously recognized church. Ministry officials also stated that the attempts of the Macedonian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches to register separately from the Serbian Orthodox Church, which does not recognize either church, were the result of an internal schism in which the state could not become involved.

During the reporting period, the Religion Ministry rejected for a second time an application for registration from the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (MOC); the Supreme Court had ruled in June 2008 that the Religion Ministry violated procedure in its November 2007 rejection of the MOC's application and ordered the Ministry to reconsider the application. In response to the second denial, the MOC filed a new appeal, which was pending before the Supreme Court at the end of the reporting period.

NGOs claimed that the Government's refusal to register minority religious groups signaled that it would tolerate attacks on those groups. In some cases police responded to attacks against houses of worship only after confirming that the group was registered. Police response to vandalism and other societal acts against religious groups rarely resulted in arrests, indictments, or other resolution of incidents. In addition, government actions made it difficult for Orthodox churches that were not recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church to operate.

Unlike in previous periods, there were no reports that police interrupted Romanian-language services at Romanian Orthodox churches in the eastern region. According to press reports, however, local authorities in Negotin reportedly decided to demolish a Romanian Orthodox church for which a construction permit had been previously issued.

During his May 18-20, 2009, visit to Sandzak, Mustafa Ceric, reis-ul-ulema of the Bosnian Islamic community, alleged that the rights of Muslims in Serbia were not respected, citing his inability to deliver a public address and the heavy police presence in towns he visited. Government officials, including Minister for Human and Minority Rights Svetozar Ciplic, denied these charges and pointed out that two Bosniak Muslims from Sandzak were government ministers. The Ministry of Religion released a statement on May 22, 2009, declaring that Ceric was not a welcome guest in the country due to his "threatening and offensive remarks." Although the Ministry later softened its stance, the Islamic Community in Serbia, which supports Ceric, called for Religion Minister Bogoljub Sijakovic to resign. The Ministry responded by issuing a statement on May 26 in which it criticized the Islamic Community in Serbia for assuming the right to judge the work of the Ministry on behalf of all religious communities.

As in previous periods, there were some reports that government officials criticized minority religious groups, using pejorative terms such as "sects," "satanists," and "deviants." Zoran Lukovic, head of the section for polygraph examinations for the Belgrade police and a member of the Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances (MIVILUDES), stated in a March 27, 2009, newspaper article that Jehovah's Witnesses was a "hermetic sect" whose members should not be allowed to act as adoptive or foster parents. Lukovic previously equated Protestant churches with "satanic sects." In March 2009 Jehovah's Witnesses filed a libel complaint against Lukovic with the First Municipal Court in Belgrade, which rejected the complaint, stating that Jehovah's Witnesses failed to demonstrate that Lukovic intended to insult the group. Jehovah's Witnesses

appealed this decision to Belgrade District Court, and the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

NGOs called attention to contradictory provisions in a mandatory broadcasting code of conduct issued by the Republic Broadcasting Agency in 2007. The code bans discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion but also requires broadcasters to "draw a clear line between recognized churches and religious communities on the one hand and sects on the other." It also states that only registered churches and religious communities are permitted to have programs on public broadcasting and that sects can be mentioned only in the context of analysis of social processes. The code does not provide a definition of "sects."

Protestant leaders and NGOs continued to object to the teaching of religion in public schools, while leaders of religious groups excluded from the program continued to express dissatisfaction with the Government's narrow definition of religion. The Government Committee for Religious Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools was composed of civil servants from the Religion Ministry and representatives of the seven "traditional" religious communities; there were no representatives of minority religious groups on the committee.

NGOs reported that only Orthodox religion classes were offered in multiconfessional Belgrade. The Religion Ministry refuted this claim but explained that there must be a minimum of five students in a given grade to justify establishment of a specific religion class.

The appointment of new religion teachers--supporters of the Belgrade-based Islamic Community of Serbia--in elementary schools in Tutin and Sjenica provoked protests from the Novi Pazar-based Islamic Community in Serbia that the teachers were unqualified. The Islamic Community also criticized as state interference in religious affairs existing provisions that assign responsibility for appointing religious teachers to the Ministry of Education.

Authorities continued at times to deny unregistered communities building permits and refused to recognize their official documents. Jehovah's Witnesses in Bor were not able to obtain an occupancy permit for an already constructed house of worship, although they filed an appeal with the Ministry for Environment and Zoning district office in Zajecar; the appeal was pending at the end of the reporting period. The League of Baptists in Belgrade, which conducted its services and other activities in an old building it purchased to use as a church, reported that municipal authorities continued to refuse, without explanation, a permit to renovate

the building. The Romanian Orthodox Church continued to receive no response to its request for a permit to build a monastery in Vojvodina.

The law on restitution of communal and religious property recognizes claims for religious property confiscated in 1945 or later. Some religious groups--particularly the Jewish and Islamic communities, who lost land prior to 1945--expressed opposition to this benchmark. Representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities also expressed concern that linking religious community restitution with individual restitution would cause delays. In April 2009 representatives of the Islamic Community in Serbia told visiting UN Special Rapporteur Jahangir that there was discrimination against Islamic groups in the restitution process. Unregistered religious communities were ineligible to seek property restitution.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On November 26, 2008, Assistant Religion Minister Dragan Novakovic expressed to the NGO Forum 18 news service his regret that most attacks on religious communities were prosecuted as minor offenses such as disturbing the peace instead of as incitement of hatred, which carries more severe penalties. This statement echoed comments by the Center for Development of Civil Society in Zrenjanin that both police and prosecutors increasingly were reluctant to press charges under Article 317 of the Criminal Code (incitement of national, racial, and religious hatred and intolerance).

In April 2009 Assistant Minister Novakovic visited a licensed Adventist high school in Novi Sad. On December 18, 2008, he met with Jehovah's Witnesses' representatives in Belgrade, the first such visit of a government official to the group's premises.

Local authorities in Mladenovac issued a permit to the Christian Adventist Church to continue construction of its place of worship, a project that had been halted for more than two years due to previous decisions ordering destruction of the building.

Progress continued on restitution of religious property seized in 1945 or later. The Directorate for Restitution of Communal and Religious Property received 3,049 restitution requests from the Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Jewish Community, Romanian Orthodox Church, Reformation Church, Islamic Community, Evangelical Church, and Association of Christian Baptist Churches. According to the Directorate, by the end of 2008, 160 requests had been completed and approximately 2,000 requests were being processed; the most common problem in processing requests was incomplete documentation submitted by claimants. During the reporting period, some property was restored to the Serbian Orthodox Church in the dioceses of Backa, Zica, and Srem; the Catholic Church received property in Pancevo and Sremska Mitrovica; and the Jewish community received approximately 5,400 square feet of apartments and business space in Belgrade.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were fewer reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, leaders of minority religious communities continued to report acts of vandalism, hate speech, physical attacks, and negative media reports. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, in some cases it is difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin.

NGOs reported a decreasing number of religious attacks, but religious communities, especially minority religious communities, continued to experience vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. Most attacks involved spray-painted graffiti; thrown rocks, bricks, or bottles; or vandalized tombstones. NGOs criticized authorities for their slow or inadequate response.

On June 1, 2009, unidentified perpetrators destroyed 11 tombstones at a Jewish cemetery in Subotica. On June 6, 2009, unknown individuals damaged an additional seven gravestones, which dated to the 19th century. Tomislav Harlbror, head of the Subotica Jewish community, told the press that the lack of chauvinistic graffiti on the destroyed grave markers likely indicated vandalism by youths rather than a religiously motivated attack.

During the night of May 31, 2009, 713 tombstones in a Serbian Orthodox graveyard in the village of Stapar near Sombor were desecrated. On June 6, police

arrested a man from Stapar on suspicion that he had broken and damaged the gravestones. However, local residents expressed doubt that one individual singlehandedly could have caused the damage.

On March 30, 2009, the media reported that a group of young men unsuccessfully attempted to remove part of a crucifix from the Roman Catholic church in Temerin on the night of March 28. Police investigated but did not make any arrests. Vojvodina Ombudsman Petar Teofilovic condemned the incident.

On November 17, 2008, the Christian Adventist Church reported that unknown perpetrators damaged four vehicles in the courtyard of its church in Belgrade the previous day. The Church also reported that "hate messages" had been written on the walls of Adventist churches in Kragujevac, Leskovac, Jagodina, and Sivac during October and November 2008. Church representatives reported the damage to its vehicles to the police, which conducted an investigation. There were no arrests as of the end of the reporting period.

During the first week of August 2008, unidentified individuals twice sprayed graffiti with nationalist symbols and vulgar messages about Jehovah's Witnesses on the kingdom hall in Sremska Mitrovica.

On July 8, 2008, in the town of Bor, citizens prevented further construction of a Jehovah's Witnesses house of worship. The group eventually managed to complete one portion of the building but was unable to obtain an occupancy permit from local authorities. As a result, the house of worship was not in use at the end of the reporting period.

According to unconfirmed NGO reports, the pastor and congregation of the Adventist church in Uzice relocated to Zlatibor due to persistent threats and vandalism.

Some right-wing youth groups continued to advocate openly against "sects." In addition, the press, mostly tabloid media, continued to publish "antisect" propaganda that labeled smaller, multiethnic Christian churches--including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses--and other smaller religious groups as "sects" and claimed they were dangerous. Religious leaders continued to note that instances of vandalism often occurred soon after the publication of press reports characterizing some religious groups as sects.

In October 2008 several booksellers at the annual Belgrade Book Fair displayed *The Kingdom of the Hazars*, an anti-Semitic work by Serbian author Dejan Lucic; fair officials did not take any action to remove the book from the stalls.

The law bans hate speech, but translations of anti-Semitic literature were available from ultranationalist groups. Right-wing youth groups and Internet forums continued to promote anti-Semitism and use hate speech against the Jewish community.

The Islamic community remained divided into two groups supported by competing political parties, causing tensions between the groups that resulted in brawls and shootings at religious buildings in Sandzak and, in one case in April 2009, in Novi Sad.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government continued to promote ethnic and religious tolerance. U.S. embassy officials advocated for changes in the religion law that would eliminate the discriminatory elements. Embassy representatives urged senior government officials to speak out against incidents targeting ethnic minorities (including their places of worship and cemeteries) and to identify and punish the perpetrators.

Embassy officials met regularly with government officials, representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and leaders of religious and ethnic minorities to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights and to encourage interfaith activities. The Embassy reached out to the divided Islamic community and hosted an iftar, to which leaders of other religious groups also were invited, to demonstrate U.S. support for the country's multiconfessional society. Embassy officials met regularly with Muslim leaders to encourage peaceful resolution of their differences. The Embassy also counseled religious groups to report all incidents targeting their property or adherents to senior government officials as a way to counter the often indifferent response by local police.

SEYCHELLES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 444 square miles and a population of 82,000. The 2002 government census estimated that 82 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent Anglican. Other Christian groups include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hindus, Muslims, and Baha'is are present in small numbers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, and Christmas.

Government employees of all religious backgrounds can request paid leave on any of their holy days, and such requests are usually granted. The Islamic Society of Seychelles generally submits requests to the Department of Public Administration for Muslim employees to receive leave on Islamic festival days.

The Government provides program time to different religious organizations on the national radio broadcasting service. On alternating Sunday mornings, the national radio service aired Catholic Mass and Anglican services, which lasted from 1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. The Government allows Muslim and Hindu groups a 15-minute broadcast every Friday afternoon, and the Baha'is and Seventh-day Adventists a 15-minute broadcast every Saturday afternoon.

Religious groups are not required to register but must apply to the Ministry of Finance to receive tax exemptions. The Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, along with mosques and the Baha'i local spiritual assembly, are incorporated with the Ministry of Finance and receive tax privileges. The Registrar of Associations recognizes 25 other religious groups that are not incorporated with the Ministry of Finance.

An amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act prohibits political parties and religious groups from obtaining radio licenses. The amendment was under legal challenge before the Court of Appeal.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, the short biweekly nonworship broadcasts of Catholics and Anglicans were censored before they were broadcast.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy in Mauritius, which is responsible for U.S. diplomatic relations with Seychelles, repeatedly raised concerns about broadcasting restrictions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

SIERRA LEONE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There was one report of societal abuse based on religious affiliation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 29,925 square miles and a population of 6.4 million. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC) estimates that 60 percent of the population is Muslim, 20 to 30 percent Christian, and 5 to 10 percent practitioners of indigenous and other religious beliefs, mostly animist. There are small numbers of Baha'is, Hindus, and Jews.

Evangelicals are a growing minority in the Christian community. Many citizens practice a mixture of Islam or Christianity with traditional indigenous religious beliefs.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially ended in 2002, resulted in movement between regions by large segments of the population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in all schools. Students may choose whether to attend the religious knowledge classes that the schools offer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was one report of societal abuse based on religious affiliation.

On April 29, 2009, persons who claimed to be acting on the orders of an unidentified imam burned a church in the village of Rogbon in Kambia Province, reportedly in response to the razing of the abandoned mosque that had previously occupied the site. No one was injured.

A government task force, which included government ministers, religious leaders, and observers from the diplomatic community, visited the church site, heard testimony from villagers, and interviewed stakeholders. A separate criminal investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The IRC, composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, played a vital role in civil society and actively participated in efforts to further the peace process in the

country and the subregion. Evangelical Christians have a separate communal organization, the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone. Previous membership applications from Baha'i and Jewish communities to the IRC lapsed during the reporting period.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SINGAPORE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, other laws and policies restricted this right in some circumstances.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government does not tolerate speech or actions that it deems could adversely affect racial or religious harmony.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of the U.S. Government's overall policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 270 square miles and a population of 4.8 million, of whom 3.6 million are citizens or permanent residents. According to the last decennial census taken in 2000, 85 percent of citizens and permanent residents profess a religion. Approximately 42.5 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent Muslim, 15 percent Christian, 8.5 percent Taoist, and 4 percent Hindu. Adherents of other religious groups, including small Sikh, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Jain communities, comprise less than one percent of the population. The remainder of the population, approximately 15 percent, does not profess a religion.

Approximately 74.7 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, 13.6 percent ethnic Malay, and 8.9 percent ethnic Indian. Nearly all ethnic Malays are Muslim. Among ethnic Indians, 55 percent are Hindu, 25 percent are Muslim, and 12 percent are Christian. The ethnic Chinese population includes mainly Buddhists (54 percent), Taoists (11 percent), and Christians (16.5 percent). There are no current membership estimates for the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Unification Church, the two religious groups that the Government has declined to recognize.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, other laws and policies restricted this right in some circumstances. The Constitution states that every person has a constitutional right to profess, practice, or propagate his or her religious belief so long as such activities do not breach any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality. There is no state religion.

Religious groups, like all associations of 10 or more persons, must be registered under the Societies Act. Registered societies are subject to potential deregistration by the Government on a variety of grounds, such as having purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or good order. The Government deregistered the country's congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 and the Unification Church in 1982, making them unlawful societies. Such a designation makes it impossible to maintain a legal identity as a religious group, with consequences relating to owning property, conducting financial transactions, and holding public meetings.

The Government plays an active but limited role in religious affairs. For example, the Government seeks to ensure that citizens, most of whom live in government-built housing, have ready access to religious organizations traditionally associated with their ethnic groups by helping such institutions find space in these housing complexes. The Government maintains a semiofficial relationship with the Muslim community through the Majlis Ulama Islam Singapura (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, MUIS), which comprises Muslims appointed by the President to serve three-year terms. The MUIS advises the Government on concerns of the Muslim community, drafts the approved weekly sermon used in mosques throughout the country, regulates some Islamic religious matters, and oversees a mosque-building fund financed by voluntary payroll deductions. The Constitution states that Malay Muslims are "the indigenous people of Singapore" and requires the Government to protect and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic interests.

The Administration of Muslim Law Act provides Muslims with the option to have their family affairs governed by Muslim law, "as varied where applicable by Malay custom." Under the Act, a Shari'a Court has non-exclusive jurisdiction over the marital affairs of Muslims, including maintenance payments, the disposition of property upon divorce, and custody of minor children. Orders of the Shari'a Court are enforced by the ordinary civil courts. Appeals within the Shari'a system are made to an Appeal Board composed of three members of the MUIS, drawn by the President of the MUIS from a panel of seven nominated every two years by the President of Singapore. The ruling of the Appeal Board is final and may not be appealed or called into question in any other court.

The Administration of Muslim Law Act allows Muslim men to practice polygamy, but requests to take additional wives may be refused in accordance with Muslim law by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which solicits the views of existing wives and reviews the financial capability of the husband. In the reporting period there were 43 applications for polygamous marriage, 11 of which were approved. The remainder were rejected, were withdrawn, or remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Under the Act, certain criminal offenses apply only to those who profess Islam, including cohabitation outside of marriage and publicly expounding any doctrine relating to the Muslim religion in a manner contrary to Muslim law.

The Presidential Council for Minority Rights examines all legislation to ensure that it does not disadvantage particular racial or religious communities. The Council for Minority Rights also considers and reports on matters concerning any racial or religious community that are referred to it by Parliament or the Government.

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act establishes a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony. The President of Singapore appoints its members on the advice of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights. Two-thirds of the members are required to be representatives of the major religions in Singapore. The Council for Religious Harmony considers and reports on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony in Singapore that are referred to it by the Minister for Home Affairs or by Parliament.

Encouragement of religious harmony and toleration is part of the official primary and secondary public school curricula. The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Religious instruction is allowed in private schools, such as madrassahs (Islamic schools). During the reporting period, there were 11 private religious schools offering primary and secondary education, nine of which were madrassahs and two of which were affiliated with Christian churches. All private school students must meet or exceed the public school performance standard on annual achievement exams.

The Government observes Hari Raya Haji and Hari Raya Puasa (Islamic), Good Friday and Christmas (Christian), Deepavali (Hindu), and Vesak Day (Buddhist) as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. By application of the Societies Act, the Government restricts certain religious groups, such as the Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. Section 24(1)(a) of the Act allows the Government to deregister any society if it is deemed to have "purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare or good order in Singapore." Deregistration makes a religious group an "unlawful society." Anyone who acts as a member of or attends a meeting of an unlawful society may be punished with a fine, imprisonment, or both. No charges were brought against persons attending or holding religious meetings in private homes during the reporting period.

Missionaries, with the exception of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the Unification Church, are permitted to work and to publish and distribute religious texts; however, while the Government does not formally prohibit evangelical activities, in practice it discourages activities that it deems may upset the balance of intergroup relations. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act authorizes the Minister for Home Affairs to issue a restraining order against any person in a position of authority within a religious group where the Minister is satisfied that the person is causing feelings of enmity or hostility between different religious groups, or is promoting political causes, carrying out subversive activities, or exciting disaffection against the Government under the guise of practicing religion. Any restraining order must be referred to the Council for Religious Harmony, which has the duty of recommending to the President that the order be confirmed, cancelled, or amended. Restraining orders lapse after 90 days at most, unless confirmed by the President. The Minister must review a confirmed restraining order at least once every 12 months and may revoke such an order at any time. The Act prohibits judicial review of restraining orders issued under its authority. No restraining order has been issued since the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act was enacted in 1990.

All written materials published by the International Bible Students Association and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, both publishing arms of the Jehovah's Witnesses, remain banned by the Government under the Undesirable Publications Act. The Government also prohibits importation of publications by the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, the Children of God (also known as the Family of Love, the Family, and Family International), and the Church of Satan. A person in possession of a prohibited publication can be fined up to \$1333 (S\$2,000) and jailed up to 12 months for a first conviction. There were no government seizures of publications by any of these groups during this reporting period.

A married couple was convicted of several offenses, including sedition, for distributing illustrated Christian religious tracts to Singaporean Muslims. The trial court held that the defendants violated the Sedition Act because the tracts promoted ill will and hostility between different religious groups. One of the tracts features a character describing Islam as "dangerous" and another character calling the Prophet Mohammed a pedophile. Each defendant received a prison sentence of eight weeks, but the couple remained free on bond at the end of the reporting period pending appeals of their convictions.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Government continued to promote harmony among different ethnic and religious groups through the Community Engagement Program (CEP). The CEP began in 2006, primarily to foster social cohesion to minimize ethnic or religious discord in the event of a terrorist attack on Singapore. During the reporting period, the CEP held community-based seminars, sports outreach events, and interfaith community events, as well as administering working groups on religious and community harmony.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of the U.S. Government's overall policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contacts with the various religious communities in the country.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. An appeal questioning the constitutionality of an amendment to the religious registration law that increased the requirements for a religious group to register remained pending at the Constitutional Court.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were limited reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Periodic acts of anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of the population.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 18,900 square miles and a population of 5.4 million. According to the 2001 census, self-described Roman Catholics constitute 68.9 percent of the population and Augsburg Lutherans 6.9 percent. Smaller religious groups include Greek Catholics, the Reformed Christian Church, Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, various Protestant groups, Jews, Baha'is, and Muslims.

There is some correlation between religious differences and political or ethnic differences. The Christian Democratic Party, which has ties to the Catholic faith, is the only political party to advocate an explicitly religious agenda. The founders of the Party of Conservative Democrats, a new offshoot of the Christian Democratic Party, are also closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Greek Catholics are ethnic Slovaks and Ruthenians (Ukrainians), although some Ruthenians follow the Orthodox faith. Followers of the Orthodox Church live predominantly in the eastern part of the country. The Reformed Christian Church is found primarily in the south, near the border with Hungary, where many ethnic Hungarians live. Other religious groups tend to be spread evenly throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, an amendment to the religious registration law disadvantages smaller religious groups.

The law defines the status of religious groups that are registered with the Government. The law does not prohibit the existence of nontraditional religious groups. It allows the Government to enter into agreements with smaller religious communities.

No official state religion exists; however, because of the number of adherents, Roman Catholicism is considered the dominant religion. A 2001 concordat with the Vatican provides the legal framework for relations between the country's Catholic Church, the Government, and the Vatican. Two corollaries deal with military service in the chaplaincy for priests and religious education. A 2002 agreement between the Government and 11 other registered religious groups attempts to counterbalance the Vatican agreement and provide equal status to the remaining registered religious groups. A corollary agreement on religious education, identical versions of which were signed with the 11 other registered religious groups, mandates that all public elementary schools require children to take either a religion class or an ethics class, depending on their (or their parents') preference. Despite some concerns, smaller religious groups reiterated that they were generally pleased with the system.

The Government observes Epiphany, Easter, the Day of the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day as national holidays. An agreement with the Vatican prohibits the removal or alteration of existing religious holidays considered state holidays.

Registration of religious groups is not required. However, registered groups receive government benefits, including subsidies for clergymen; office expenses; the right to visit, proselytize, and minister to their members in prisons and hospitals; the right to conduct legal marriage ceremonies; and access to public television broadcasting. The Roman Catholic Church, as the largest religious

group, receives the most government subsidies. Government funding also is provided to religious schools and to teachers who lecture on religion in state schools. The Government occasionally subsidizes one-time projects and significant religious activities, and registered religious groups are partly exempt from paying taxes and import custom fees. A group may elect not to accept the subsidies.

According to the 2007 registration law, for a group to register as a religious organization, 20,000 adult members of the group who are citizens or permanent residents must submit an "honest declaration" attesting to their membership, knowledge of articles of faith and basic tenets of the religion, personal identity numbers and home addresses, and support for the group's registration. Additionally, the act governing registration of citizens associations specifically excludes religious organizations and churches.

The Department of Church Affairs at the Ministry of Culture oversees relations between religious groups and the state and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. However, the Ministry cannot intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups and does not direct their activities. The Ministry administers a cultural grant program that allocates money for the upkeep of cultural and religious monuments.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The requirement that a registered organization have 20,000 adult members disadvantaged smaller religious groups. Although such groups were able to function, they complained that they were in legal limbo with the authorities and could have difficulty gaining access to their clergy and other resources in certain situations. For example, clergy from unregistered religious groups could not conduct official visits to minister to their members in prison and government hospitals. Occasionally, members of these groups were prevented from burying their relatives in municipal cemeteries.

In March 2009 the Supreme Court decided in favor of the Christian Fellowship in its appeal of the Ministry of Culture's 2007 rejection of the group's application for registration. On May 20, 2009, the Ministry of Culture received the Supreme

Court's decision, which stated that the Ministry did not provide sufficient evidence to support the rejection of the group's application for registration. Consequently, the Ministry renewed the registration process and informed the Christian Fellowship. The Ministry began collecting additional documents and materials required for the registration process according to the relevant legislation.

The case filed in February 2008 by the Prosecutor General at the Constitutional Court against the May 2007 registration law, claiming that it is discriminatory and violates freedom of association, was pending at the end of the reporting period.

The Atheist Church's complaint to the Constitutional Court regarding the Ministry of Culture's rejection of its registration application was pending at the end of the reporting period.

The state-funded Institute of State-Church Relations monitored and researched new religious movements and drafted analyses for the Department of Church Affairs of the Ministry of Culture; however, it was difficult to identify these groups because they often register as NGOs rather than as religious groups. The institute researched new religious groups that were suspected of attempting to infiltrate schools, such as the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church. The institute also conducted seminars, issued publications, and provided information to the media regarding its findings.

Some property restitution cases remained unresolved. Religious organizations applied for the return of their property confiscated by the former communist government under the 1993 law on the restitution of communal property, which specified a filing deadline of December 31, 1994. The Government, municipalities, state legal entities, and, under certain conditions, private persons returned property in its existing condition. Restituted churches, synagogues, and cemeteries generally were in poor condition. The law did not provide compensation for the damage done under the communists, and religious groups often lacked the funds to restore these properties to a usable state.

In some cases, although the Government returned a property, it was not vacated by the former tenant, often a school or hospital with nowhere else to go. There also were problems with the return of property that was undeveloped at the time of seizure but was subsequently developed. The main obstacles to the resolution of outstanding restitution claims were the Government's lack of financial resources and bureaucratic resistance on the part of those entities required to vacate restitutable properties.

The 2005 restitution law permitted religious organizations to claim agricultural land and forests as well as other nonreligious property (community halls, schools, etc.) taken between May 8, 1945 (November 2, 1938, for the Jewish community), and January 1, 1990, and established April 30, 2006, as the filing deadline. With the exception of the Reformed Christian Church, religious groups had few remaining claims for unreturned property. Several religious institutions noted that they could not provide precise data on the few outstanding claims because many of their branches operated somewhat independently. The Reformed Christian Church alleged that the 2005 law addresses some complex property claims but does not resolve the cases of approximately 70 church properties (church schools, teachers' facilities, etc.) that were owned by individual parishes and nationalized by the communist government after 1948. Reformed Christian Church officials also complained that the Government did not allow religious organizations to draw from European Union structural funds for social purposes.

The Roman Catholic Church, represented by the Slovak Bishops' Conference, claimed that there were no precise statistics on returned property, but several claims remained pending in the courts. The bishops believed that the state had returned approximately 33 to 35 percent of Catholic Church property. The Church is not eligible to reacquire lands originally registered to church foundations that no longer exist or operate in the country, such as the Benedictines. However, the bishops advocated a broader view of the issue, linking restitution with current state support. They believed that existing subsidies of churches and their priests' salaries mitigated an incomplete restitution process.

There was no progress in the 2003 lawsuit the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic filed against Germany to claim compensation for monies paid by the wartime Slovak government to Germany to cover the cost of Germany's deportation of 57,000 members of the country's Jewish population.

According to a corollary to the Vatican concordat, a 2004 law requires public elementary school students to take either a religion or ethics class. Critics claimed that students in some schools, particularly in poor, rural communities, might be denied a choice or were pressured to choose the religious class.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Numerous acts of anti-Semitism occurred during the reporting period. Police arrested individuals in towns such as Roznava, Nitra, Kolinany, Dolne Obdokovce, and others for painting swastikas on public buildings or propagating fascist ideology.

In April 2009 Arpad Tarnoczy, known for his pro-Tiso sentiments and former chairman of the Union of Anti-Communist Resistance (ZPKO), was proposed and subsequently elected by Parliament to be a new member of the Institute for National Memory (UPN) supervisory board. The ZPKO issues the newsletter *Svedectvo* (Testimony), which Jewish community officials have criticized for rehabilitating and advocating the idea of the Slovak war-time fascism. Tarnoczy also previously unveiled a monument to Jozef Kirchbaum, the chief of the Hlinka Guard and later ambassador of the war-time Slovak state to Switzerland. In addition, the UPN's leadership was criticized during the reporting period for including Tiso apologists on the board. In the past the UPN carried out cooperative programs with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Approximately 250 persons (and perhaps 75 police officers) gathered in front of the presidential palace in Bratislava on March 14, 2009, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the first Slovak state in 1939 and pay respect to its president, Jozef Tiso, who was executed for treason and collaboration with the enemies of Czechoslovakia after World War II. The participants--mostly young, dressed in black, and with shaved heads--originally planned to march from the palace to the presumed grave of President Tiso. The march was broken up, however, after one of the coorganizers was arrested for calling out "Na Straz!" (On Guard!), the greeting of the Hlinka Guard, an official World War II-era paramilitary organization responsible for internal security and the deportation of thousands of Slovak Jews and Roma. The law forbids use of the phrase "Na Straz."

The number of prosecutions for racially motivated crimes, although low, continued to increase as a result of the creation of a specialized police unit, the placement of an advisor in the Bratislava Regional Police, and increased training. However, NGO activists claimed that extremist networks were continuing to develop and that sophisticated police attention to this phenomenon was decreasing.

There were several ecumenical organizations that fostered closer relationships among religious groups. The Ecumenical Council of Churches operated and represented several groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy continued to follow the status of the religious registration law.

The U.S. Embassy maintained contacts with a broad spectrum of religious groups and encouraged tolerance for minority religious groups. Embassy officers and official visitors met with officials of major and minor religious groups to discuss property restitution issues as well as human rights conditions and religious freedom. During the reporting period, the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires met with Helsinki Commission representatives during a February 2009 visit to Bratislava, in which they discussed minority integration, religious freedom, and human rights in Slovakia with government and NGO interlocutors.

The Embassy also continued its dialogue with the Slovak Bishops' Conference, Ecumenical Council of Churches, Federation of Jewish Communities, Orthodox Church, and other religious groups. The Embassy fostered an effective dialogue among religious groups, the Ministry of Culture, and the Commission for the Preservation of U.S. Heritage Abroad on matters of importance to the Commission.

SLOVENIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of minor societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 7,827 square miles and a population of 2 million. According to the 2002 census, 58 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 2 percent is Muslim, and 2 percent is Orthodox Christian. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include evangelical Protestants, "other Christians," "other Protestants," "Oriental" religions, "other religions," agnostics, and Jews. In addition, 3 percent of the population is classified as "believers but belonging to no religion," and 10 percent as "unbelievers/atheists"; 16 percent gave no reply in the census, and 7 percent are classified as "unknown."

The Orthodox and Muslim populations generally correspond to the immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion as well as inciting religious discrimination and inflaming religious hatred and intolerance.

The Religious Freedoms Act, which entered into force in 2007, codifies the Government's respect for religious freedom, legal status and rights of churches and other religious communities, rights of members, process of registration with the Government, rights of registered churches and religious communities, and responsibilities of the Government's Office for Religious Communities. The National Council (the upper house of Parliament) challenged the constitutionality of the act shortly after it came into force. At the end of the reporting period, the Constitutional Court was reviewing the act's constitutionality.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Sunday and Monday, Pentecost, the Assumption, Christmas, and Reformation Day. Members of religious communities whose important religious festivities do not coincide with those work-free days have the right to use their regular annual leave on their holy days.

The Constitution and military law provide for conscientious objection to military service based on "religious, philosophical, or humanitarian belief."

There are no formal requirements for recognition of religious groups by the Government, and activities of religious communities are unrestricted regardless of whether they register with the Government. However, religious communities must register with the Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities, a status that entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. According to the Religious Freedoms Act, religious communities must have at least one hundred adult members and must have operated in the country for at least 10 years to register. Religious communities must submit a basic application to the Office for Religious Communities providing proof that these two requirements are met as well as the names of the community's representatives in the country, a description of the foundations of the community's religious beliefs, and the organizational act of the church or community. Religious communities registered under the previous law were automatically registered under the new law. The Office for Religious Communities did not receive any new applications during the reporting period.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been government policy since 1991 to pay the social insurance contribution for clergy and other full-time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer. The Religious Freedoms Act directs the Government to pay social insurance contributions for one religious employee per one thousand members of a recognized religious community.

At state-licensed schools, lessons with the goal of educating children in a particular religion are forbidden, as are prayer meetings. The Government partially finances teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools. Licensed schools may not display religious symbols, but students are permitted to wear religious symbols. At unlicensed private religious schools, religious lessons generally are mandatory.

The Government finances small grants for recognized religious organizations.

Individuals can file informal complaints of human rights violations, including violations of religious freedom, by national or local authorities with the Human Rights Ombudsman.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Muslim community leaders expressed concern that their community continued to be unable to provide adequate religious services in hospitals. Although the Ministry of Health adopted regulations on spiritual/religious service in hospitals in October 2008, by the end of the reporting period, the Ministry had not approved the Islamic Community's five candidates to provide religious services and counseling to hospitalized Muslims.

The Islamic Community and city officials made some progress towards the establishment of a mosque and Islamic cultural center in Ljubljana. The Islamic Community completed the purchase of land for the mosque on December 31, 2008. In April 2009 Ljubljana's mayor promised that the city would pay half of planning expenses for construction, and the Islamic Community expected to complete architectural plans by September 2009, with construction to begin shortly thereafter. The mayor rejected a January 2009 attempt by a city council member to require a referendum on the mosque. The city council member appealed the decision to the Administrative Court, which rejected the appeal in June 2009.

By March 2008 the Government had adjudicated 1,006 (84.5 percent) of 1,191 Catholic denationalization claims for properties--church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests--that were nationalized after World War II. Catholic claims were only a small portion of the total number of

denationalization claims (39,642), of which by July 2008 the Government had settled 38,584 (97.3 percent).

At the end of the reporting period, there had been no restitution of Jewish communal and heirless properties confiscated or nationalized during and after World War II. In 2007, acting on a tender awarded by the Ministry of Justice, the Institute of Contemporary History researched a report on such properties. Also in 2007 the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) funded a separate report that was researched by two experts affiliated with the Institute for Ethnic Studies. The Ministry of Justice stated that the Institute of Contemporary History finished its report in spring 2008 but would not publish or translate it into English until the WJRO had completed its own report. At the end of the reporting period, neither report had been published. The Ministry of Justice, the WJRO, and the Jewish Community of Slovenia planned to discuss restitution after both reports were complete.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On January 27, 2009, the Government observed its first Holocaust Remembrance Day.

On September 7, 2008, the Jewish community, supported by local government officials, held the third annual European Day of Jewish Culture festival, which the President attended and which received broad media coverage.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of minor societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Interfaith relations were generally amicable, although there was little warmth between the Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that it viewed as aggressive proselytizers.

In November 2008 vandals defaced graves located in the mountains of the northwestern region; the graves contained the remains of Muslim soldiers, mostly Bosnians, who fought in World War I. The vandals spray-painted symbols of Serbian nationalism on the traditional Muslim wooden grave markers.

Jewish community representatives reported some prejudice, ignorance, false stereotypes, and negative images of Jews within society.

The Government promoted tolerance and antibias education through its programs in primary and secondary schools and made the Holocaust a mandatory topic in the primary and secondary contemporary history curriculum.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization and restitution of heirless and communal Jewish properties confiscated or nationalized after World War II. In addition, the Embassy made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. Embassy representatives met with members of all major religious communities and concerned government officials to discuss religious freedom. The Embassy also provided a small amount of financial support to the European Day of Jewish Culture.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago with an area of 11,599 square miles and a population of 523,000. Approximately 92 percent of the population is affiliated with one of the following Christian churches: Anglican, 35 percent; Roman Catholic, 19 percent; South Seas Evangelical, 17 percent; Methodist, 11 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 10 percent. These five groups comprise the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), an ecumenical nongovernmental organization that plays a leading role in the civic life of the country. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, practices indigenous animistic religions. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, the Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Unification Church, and indigenous churches that have broken away from the major Christian denominations. According to reports, there are approximately 350 Muslims scattered in small numbers around Honiara, Malaita, and Rusell Island. There are believed to be members of other religious groups within the foreign community, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious services.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Department of Home Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterized its role as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression on the one hand, and maintaining public order on the other. All religious institutions are required to register with the Government, and there were no reports that registration was denied to any group.

In general the Government does not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are schools sponsored by the Catholic Church, the Church of Melanesia (Anglican), the United Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Upon independence, the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed instead to subsidize their operations.

The public school curriculum includes an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the Christian churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. The Government subsidizes church schools only if they align their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although non-Christian religious instruction may be taught in the schools for practitioners of those religions, there was no such instruction during the reporting period. Government oaths of office are customarily taken on the Bible. The Constitution forbids religious tests for public office.

Western missionaries representing several denominations brought Christianity to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some foreign missionaries continue to work in the country. Except for the Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 30 percent foreign, the clergy of the established churches is nearly entirely indigenous.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, were organized through the SICA, which comprises the five major churches of the country. In previous years, decisions made by some villages to mandate Sunday-only worship for Christians have marginalized Seventh-day Adventists. The society in general, however, is tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and its consular agency office in the Solomon Islands, discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SOMALIA

Although the Transitional Federal Charter (Charter) provides for religious freedom, there were limits on the extent to which this right was respected in practice.

The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) generally did not enforce legal protections of religious freedom. There was a decline in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, primarily as a result of extremist militias taking control over significant territory in the country.

Militia groups, particularly those associated with the U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) al-Shabaab, often imposed through violence a strict interpretation of Islam on communities under their control. There were also reports that individuals who do not practice Islam experienced discrimination, violence, and detention because of their religious beliefs.

The U.S. Government does not maintain a diplomatic presence, and travel to the country by U.S. government officials is restricted.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 246,200 square miles and a population of 7 million; however, population figures are difficult to estimate since the last census dates from 1975 and the instability of the country makes precise data collection impossible. A large majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims of a Sufi tradition. There is a very small, extremely low-profile Christian community, and small numbers of followers of other religions. The number of adherents of strains of conservative Islam and the number of Islamic schools supported by religiously conservative sources continued to grow.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Charter establishes the norms for protecting religious freedom. Article 15 of the Charter states: "All citizens of the Somali Republic...have the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without distinction of race, birth, language, religion, sex, or political affiliation."

Although the Charter does not possess a section that limits or protects religious practice, article 71(2) decrees that the 1960 Somalia Constitution and other national laws shall apply "in respect of all matters not covered and not inconsistent with this Charter." Article 29 of the Somalia Constitution states: "Every person has the right to freedom of conscience and to freely profess his own religion and to worship it subject to any limitations which may be prescribed by law for the purpose of safeguarding morals, public health, [and] order."

The TFG exercises limited control over most of the country, with the exception of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland in the northwest, which has its own constitution and legal and policy framework. Somaliland does not recognize the Charter or the transitional process and is seeking recognition as an independent country. The semiautonomous region of Puntland, which does not seek independence, also has its own charter and legal framework.

A political process to establish peace and stability in the country continued as the TFG and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) signed the Djibouti Agreement in August 2008. In January 2009 the TFG and ARS formed a unity government, extended the transitional period by two years, and elected Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as the new TFG president.

The Charter establishes Islam as the national religion. The Constitution and charters governing the various regions provide the right to study and discuss the religion of one's choice. Proselytizing for any religion other than Islam is strictly prohibited, however, and the TFG neither observes nor enforces constitutional provisions guaranteeing the free exercise of religion. Moreover, statutes and regulations provide no effective recourse for violations of religious freedom.

Similarly, Somaliland and Puntland establish Islam as the official religion in their regions. Article 5 (1-2) of the Somaliland Constitution establishes Islam and prohibits the promotion of any other religion. Article 313 of the Somaliland criminal code outlines penalties for Muslims who change their religion. Articles 41 and 82 state that candidates for president, vice president, or the House of Representatives must be Muslim. Article 15 stipulates that Islamic education is compulsory at all levels and that the promotion of Qur'anic schools is the responsibility of the state. The Constitution further states that the laws of the nation shall derive from and not contradict Islam.

The Puntland Constitution guarantees every person the freedom to worship; however, it also states that Muslims cannot renounce their religion. In May 2009 the Puntland cabinet approved a new Constitution; on June 30, 2009, the Puntland parliament approved the Constitution and it went into immediate effect. Article 8 of the new Constitution prohibits propagation of any religion other than Islam. Article 12 states that non-Muslims are free to practice their religion and cannot be forced to convert. However, the same article prohibits Muslims from converting from Islam. Puntland security forces closely monitored religious activities.

On May 10, 2009, the TFG ratified legislation to implement Shari'a law nationwide. In practice, the TFG does not have the capacity or mechanisms to implement the legislation uniformly.

The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of Shari'a, traditional, and customary law (Xeer), and the penal code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre government. Legal frameworks vary considerably, as each community individually regulates and enforces religious expression, often on an ad hoc basis.

The TFG and regional administrations in Puntland and Somaliland observe Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Muharam (Islamic New Year), and Mi'raaj as annual national holidays and Friday as a weekly day of prayer.

The Somaliland Constitution restricts the formation of political parties based on a particular religious group, religious beliefs, or interpretations of religious doctrine. However, the new Puntland Constitution allows the formation of political parties based on religious orientation.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs is authorized to register religious organizations; however, the Ministry has no capacity to conduct registrations.

In Somaliland religious schools and places of worship are required to obtain the Ministry of Religion's permission to operate. In Puntland, religious schools and places of worship must receive permission to operate from Puntland's Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs.

The TFG and the Somaliland and Puntland administrations permit religious instruction in public schools. Education in all regions is provided primarily by private schools and most offer religious instruction. There is a significant number of externally funded madrassahs throughout the country that provide inexpensive basic education and adhere to conservative Islamic practices. Mogadishu

University, the University of East Africa in Bosasso, Puntland, and many secondary schools in Mogadishu are externally funded and administered through organizations affiliated with Al-Islah, an Islamic organization.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The TFG generally did not enforce legal restrictions or protections concerning religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the TFG during the reporting period.

The TFG engaged in armed conflict with various groups, some of which professed conservative Islamic beliefs, including al-Shabaab and other extremist groups, such as Hisbul Islam.

There were no public places of worship for non-Muslims. Although it is illegal to convert from Islam in Somaliland and Puntland, there were no reported cases of persons punished for doing so. Proselytizing for any religion except Islam was prohibited in Puntland and Somaliland and was effectively blocked by informal societal consensus elsewhere in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On February 19, 2009, Somaliland border officials in Wajaale reportedly detained and assaulted Abdi Welli Ahmed, a Kenyan citizen and Christian convert from Islam, as he tried to cross the border from Ethiopia. The officials reportedly demanded that he recant and confiscated his personal credentials, religious materials, and cash.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

There was active violent conflict among militia groups, the TFG, and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces during the reporting period. Some of the militia groups were aligned with al-Shabaab, which the U.S. Secretary of State designated a FTO in February 2008.

During the reporting period, al-Shabaab militia captured significant territory. In the areas they controlled they systematically closed cinemas, burned kiosks selling the narcotic khat, shaved the hair of persons with western haircuts, ordered women to be fully veiled, instituted total bans on smoking and music, and strictly banned behavior they deemed un-Islamic.

Throughout the reporting period, al-Shabaab destroyed graves of revered Sufi saints, prominent clerics, and members of other religious groups in areas under its control, igniting conflict with the Muslim group Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa (ASWJ). Al-Shabaab militias killed many prominent leaders from ASWJ in the Galgaduud region.

On May 5, 2009, al-Shabaab destroyed 10 graves in Kamsuma, Lower Juba. On April 16, 2009, al-Shabaab destroyed close to 100 ancient graves in Kismayo.

On April 16, 2009, al-Shabaab forces in Baidoa arrested 25 youth for walking in town during prayer times. On April 15, 2009, the al-Shabaab administration decreed that all businesses must close during times of prayer or owners would face five days' detention. In the same decree, it required women to be fully veiled in public or risk 12 hours' detention.

On March 19, 2009, al-Shabaab beheaded two clerics from ASWJ in Balad, Middle Shabelle.

On March 1, 2009, the al-Shabaab administration in Merka banned commemoration of the Prophet's birth or Maulid celebrations. A similar ban was enforced in Bardhere, Kismayo, and Hudur. Two persons were killed and four wounded after al-Shabaab militia raided a Bardhere mosque where worshipers congregated for Maulid commemorations. Al-Shabaab arrested 50 Sufi clerics in Barawe, Lower Shabelle region, also for celebrating Maulid. They were later released after a public protest.

On February 21, 2009, al-Shabaab militia, in Yonday Village, beheaded two sons of a Christian leader who refused to give the militia information about another church leader.

On January 16, 2009, the self-proclaimed al-Shabaab administration in Kismayo publicly executed Abdirahman Haji Mohamed, a Lower Juba politician and clan militia leader after accusing him of apostasy and espionage. The Kismayo

administration spokesperson said Mohamed was found guilty of deserting Islamic religion and spying for Ethiopian forces.

On October 27, 2008, al-Shabaab militia stoned to death 13-year-old Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow in Kismayo for allegedly committing adultery after she reported that three men raped her.

On September 30, 2008, the al-Shabaab administration in Kismayo destroyed a Roman Catholic church and vowed to build a mosque in its place.

On September 23, 2008, in a village near Baidoa, al-Shabaab militia beheaded Mansuur Mohamed, a humanitarian worker, after they learned he had converted to Christianity in 2005. Al-Shabaab accused Mohamed of apostasy and spying for Ethiopian forces. There were unconfirmed reports from Lower Juba that al-Shabaab militia killed persons who possessed a Bible or who were suspected to have converted to Christianity.

On July 10, 2008, al-Shabaab militia killed Sayid Ali Sheikh Luqman in Afgoe after he reportedly confessed that he was a Christian.

Al-Shabaab administration officials used Shari'a as a tool for authoritarian control. On June 28, 2009, the al-Shabaab administration in Lower Shabelle stoned to death a man found guilty of the May 28 rape and murder of an 18-year-old woman. On June 25, 2009, al-Shabaab militia operating in Mogadishu carried out double amputations on four men convicted of theft by an al-Shabaab Shari'a court. On February 15, 2009, al-Shabaab militia publicly flogged six youth in Baidoa after a Shari'a court found them guilty of drug use. On February 6, 2009, al-Shabaab militia killed Adan Hage for possessing khat.

The TFG attempted to establish security and to limit abuses by opposition militias, with varying degrees of success.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Non-Muslims who practiced their religion openly faced occasional societal harassment. Conversion from Islam to another religion was considered socially unacceptable. Those suspected of conversion faced harassment or even death from members of their community.

There was strong societal pressure to respect traditions that reflect the traditional Somali interpretation of Sunni Islam. Al-Shabaab and affiliated organizations imposed extreme Islamic views and practices on Muslims of moderate orientation. In religiously motivated violence, al-Shabaab destroyed the tombs of revered Sufi clerics and killed clerics, civilians, and government officials of Sufi orientation. In targeted assassinations, members of these extremist groups killed TFG officials and allies whom they denounced as non-Muslims or apostates.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government does not maintain a diplomatic presence, and travel to the country by U.S. government officials is restricted. However, the U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with its contacts in the country and with regional authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 470,693 square miles and a population of 48.7 million. The 2001 religious demography census estimated that 80 percent of the population is Christian. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional African beliefs constitute 5 percent of the population. Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated it adheres to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation. Many combine Christian and indigenous religious practices.

African Independent Churches (AICs) are the largest group of Christian churches. Once regarded as Ethiopian churches, the majority are now referred to as Zionist or Apostolic churches. There are more than 4,000 AICs, with a membership of more than 10 million. The Zionist Christian Church is the largest AIC, with an estimated membership of more than four million. AICs serve more than half the population in the northern KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga areas. There are at least 900 AICs in Soweto.

Other Christian groups include Protestants (Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian) and the Roman Catholic Church. Greek Orthodox, Scientology, and Seventh-day Adventist churches are also active.

According to the 2001 census, African Traditionalists make up less than 1 percent of the population. However, of the 15 percent of the population that claimed no

religious affiliation on the 2001 census, many of these persons probably adhere to unaffiliated indigenous religions.

An estimated two-thirds of the ethnic Indian population, a majority of which resides in KwaZulu-Natal, practices Hinduism. The small Muslim community is mostly made up of Cape Malays of Indonesian descent, and the remainder is largely of Indian or Pakistani extraction.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Bill of Rights prohibits the Government from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against anyone based on religion; it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right to practice their religion and to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that community. Cases of discrimination against a person on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court.

The Constitution is deliberately religion-neutral. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths.

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000 prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of religion.

The Government observes Good Friday and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered. Religious groups can qualify as public benefit organizations which are exempt from paying income tax.

The Constitutional Court is reviewing a case brought by a local nongovernmental organization which seeks to compel the Government to recognize Muslim marriages. This action is opposed by 34 Muslim organizations, who consider recognition to be unwarranted state regulation of religion.

The Government allows, but does not require, religion education in public schools; however, religious instruction, or the advocating of tenets of a particular religious group, is not permitted in public schools. The Government has made special accommodation for individual religious groups' holy days in the scheduling of national examinations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In January 2009 Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatima Hajaig remarked at a public rally that the United States and other western countries were "in the hands of Jewish money." The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) lodged a formal complaint of anti-Semitic hate speech with the South African Human Rights Commission. Ms. Hajaig apologized for any pain caused and repudiated racism, but did not retract her remarks. Press sources reported she was summoned by the President and urged to withdraw her comments.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

According to the SAJBD, there was a low but increasing level of hostile behavior toward the Jewish community. Reported anti-Semitic incidents during the reporting period included mainly verbal abuse, as well as graffiti, hate mail, and distribution of offensive literature. There were very few acts of violence or vandalism recorded.

On September 14, 2008, during Ramadan, unknown assailants broke into a mosque in Potchefstroom, smeared the prayer room with blood, and left two pig heads behind. Faith groups, including the Council of Muslim Theologians and the Bishop Desmond Tutu Diversity Trust, condemned the desecration. Police launched an investigation; no further information was available at the end of the reporting period.

There are many ecumenical and interdenominational organizations among the various churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which represents the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), the Catholic Church, various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, and the Congregational Church, among others. The major indigenous religious groups, most of the Afrikaans-language churches, and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not members of the SACC and usually have their own coordinating and liaison bodies.

The National Religious Leaders' Forum (NRLF) represents the country's seven main faith-based communities (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, African Traditionalist, Buddhist, and Baha'i). The NRLF, in cooperation with the Government, aims to leverage its grass-roots networks to undertake social welfare initiatives such as poverty alleviation or combating HIV/AIDS.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Consulate General in Cape Town continued its support of the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative (CTII). The CTII brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, and African Traditionalists.

SPAIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There continued to be concerns that Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Buddhists do not have bilateral cooperation agreements with the Government, which would provide the same benefits and privileges as other groups with "deeply rooted status." There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. There is no state religion; however, Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion and enjoyed the closest official relationship with the Government.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination against Jews and Muslims based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government engaged with government and religious leaders on many topics throughout the year, from burial preservation issues to further integration of immigrant populations of diverse religious backgrounds.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 194,897 square miles and a population of 46.1 million.

No formal government census exists based upon religious beliefs, as the Constitution provides that no individual is obligated to answer questions regarding their ideology. Sociological data is collected, but cannot be categorized as statistically sound. The Center for Sociological Investigation (CIS), an independent government agency, periodically collects survey data on religious trends. A January 2009 CIS survey reported that 77 percent of respondents considered themselves Catholic; however, 54.7 percent of those persons stated that they almost never attend Mass. Religious groups that constitute less than 10 percent of the population include all other Christian groups: Eastern Orthodox; Protestant and evangelical denominations, including Christian Scientists; Jehovah's Witnesses; Seventh-day Adventists; and Mormons (members of The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). Also, fewer than 10 percent of the population are followers of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Baha'ism.

The Episcopal Conference of Spain estimates there are 35 million Catholics in the country. The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) estimates there are 1.2 million evangelical Christians and other Protestants, 800,000 of whom are immigrants or live in the country at least six months of the year. A September 2008 study of the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain estimates that there are more than 1.2 million Muslims in Spain, attending 13 large Islamic centers ("grand mosques") and 480 worship centers or oratories throughout the country. Other government authorities report as many as 800 Islamic oratories. The Federation of Jewish Communities estimates that there are 48,000 Jews and 22 places of worship.

The Observatorio Andalusi calculated that although there are converts to Islam, more than two-thirds of Muslims are immigrants without Spanish nationality. Most are recent immigrants from Morocco (680,000), but there are also Algerians (47,000), Pakistanis (37,000), Senegalese (31,000), and immigrants from other Arab or Islamic countries. As of January 2008, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs reported that Moroccans are the second largest legal immigrant population, after Romanians, numbering over 645,000. The largest concentrations of Muslims are in the regions of Catalonia (300,000), Andalucia (120,000), Madrid (80,000), Valencia, Murcia, and the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) noted that a small number of Christians emigrated from countries such as Egypt and Lebanon. The country also has received a large influx of immigrants from Latin America, many of them Catholics. Most Orthodox Christians are from Eastern European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. Evangelical Protestant immigrants typically come from African and Latin American countries, according to government officials.

Entities may voluntarily register with the Ministry of Justice; religious freedoms are protected regardless of whether an entity is registered. As of April 20, 2009, the MOJ's Register of Religious Entities included 12,187 entities affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. There were 2,057 non-Catholic entities and 3,583 non-Catholic places of worship registered. These included 1,337 Protestant or evangelical church entities and 2,413 Protestant or evangelical places of worship; 13 Orthodox entities and 25 Orthodox places of worship; two Jehovah's Witnesses entities and 773 places of worship; one Mormon entity with 120 places of worship; one Unification Church; four Christian Scientist entities, 20 entities of Judaism

with 22 places of worship; 563 Islamic entities with 160 places of worship; 11 entities of the Baha'i Faith with 12 places of worship; five entities of Hinduism; and 32 entities of Buddhism with 32 places of worship.

The number of non-Catholic churches and religious communities may be much larger than indicated. Some religious groups choose to register as cultural organizations with regional governments rather than with the National Registry of Religious Entities in Madrid.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Buddhists do not have bilateral cooperation agreements with the Government that would provide the same benefits and privileges as other groups with "deeply rooted status." While there are no statutory or legal restrictions, some Muslim and non-Catholic Christian groups claimed that restrictions and policies at the local level precluded them from assembling to practice their beliefs.

Article 16 of the Constitution provides for religious freedom and the freedom of worship by individuals and groups. It also states, "No faith shall have the character of a state religion." However, in federal tax documents, the Government provides taxpayers the option of allocating a percentage of their income to the Catholic Church. This financing is also available for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) but not to other religious entities. Taxpayers may select a box on their income tax forms to contribute up to 0.7 percent of their income taxes to the Catholic Church or an NGO. In 2008 taxpayers contributed approximately \$314.8 million (€241.3 million) to the Catholic Church. This sum did not include additional state funding for religion teachers in public schools or for military and hospital chaplains.

Based on the Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic religious groups' notorio arraigo (deeply rooted) status, representatives were able to enter into bilateral agreements with the Government in 1992. These agreements provide certain tax benefits and give civil validity to weddings performed by the religious groups. They also permit the religious groups to place their teachers in schools and chaplains in hospitals, prisons, and the military. Protestant entities signed the accord as the

Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE); Jewish entities signed as the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE); and Islamic entities as the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE). The CIE is composed of two federations: the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain (UCIDE).

In 2003 the Government expanded the concept of notorio arraigo faiths to allow other religious groups to sign bilateral agreements and granted the status to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although without signing a bilateral agreement. In November 2007 the MOJ granted notorio arraigo status to the Buddhist entity, as it had to the Jehovah's Witnesses in January 2007; however, the Buddhist, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormon communities do not receive the same benefits and privileges granted the other religions with cooperation agreements. Although the Government has indicated that it would amend the laws governing tax benefits and privileges for religious groups to extend these benefits to all groups achieving notorio arraigo status, Parliament has not yet adopted this proposal. On May 7, 2008, Vice President Fernández de la Vega met with the Constitutional Commission of Congress to publicly announce the Government's plans for legal reform over the next four years, among them legal reform to promote religious freedom to make its laws consistent with the pluralistic society that the country has become. On April 14, 2009, President Zapatero announced that the reform of the Law of Religious Freedom would be sent to Parliament for debate. By the end of the reporting period, however, Parliament had not received the proposed legislation.

The Government has taken steps to integrate non-Catholic religious groups through the support or sponsorship of programs on interfaith dialogue, principally through the establishment of the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence. The foundation, which provides funds to minority and religious groups to promote religious equality and dialogue, most recently funded, in part, the following: publication of the fifth volume of "Religious Minorities in Castilla-La Mancha" in March 2009; the 7th Congress of the Union of Islamic Communities in Zaragoza in March 2009, which focused on the role of women in society and specifically Muslim women in Spanish and Aragon communities; the First International Congress on Protestant Reform and Liberties in Europe, March 31 to April 1, 2009; and Ibiza's First Islamic Congress in March 2009.

The foundation's funds, \$6.5 million (€5 million) in 2009, are used for cultural, educational, and social integration programs (not religious activities). The board includes representatives of most government ministries as well as members of

concerned religious groups themselves. Beyond providing support and various seminars, the foundation published studies on religious minorities' social and cultural realities throughout the country. Studies have been completed in Andalusia and the Canary Islands and began in Murcia, Aragon, and Navarre. The foundation also hosts sports activities and provides language training and youth tutoring classes, all within the local communities. Muslim and Protestant leaders continue to cite the foundation's work as a positive step for integrating non-Catholic religious groups. The Government attributed significant increases in the number of non-Catholic religious organizations officially registering with the MOJ to this foundation, since registration was required to apply for foundation funds. Members of all religious groups also serve as members of a government Committee of Advisors on Religious Freedom.

Since 2004 Catalonia has had a regional working group called the Stable Group on Religions that is made up of the largest religions in Catalonia: Catholicism, Protestantism, the Orthodox Church, Islam, and Judaism. The group consists of three committees--one to support new arrivals, another for mediation and prevention, and a third for coordinating activities in correctional centers. The group also hosts intercultural dialogues and in December 2008 held a conference on the future of religious coexistence in Europe.

Some autonomous regions also have agreements with religious groups to encourage social integration. For example, the Catalonian government has agreements with the Islamic Council of Catalonia and Protestant, Jewish, and Baha'i religious communities. These agreements are social rather than financial in nature and are intended to encourage social integration.

In November 2007 the Constitutional Court decided that denying the Holocaust is no longer an offense punishable by incarceration since, it claimed, it is permissible in the framework of freedom of speech. Until then, the law set a punishment of up to two years in prison for this offense. The Court also opined, however, that imprisonment for the offense of justifying the Holocaust--or genocide--is compatible with the Constitution. Discussions on this matter began following the 1996 trial of a bookshop owner in Barcelona, Pedro Valera, who disseminated neo-Nazi material. Valera was sentenced to five years in prison and fined. However, the High Court in Barcelona deferred implementing the sentence pending the decision of the Constitutional Court, which ultimately decided Varela should serve two years in jail for justifying the Holocaust and three additional years for inciting racial hate--for a total sentence of five years. Since the Constitutional Court did not announce their decision on the appeal until after seven years after proceedings

had been initiated, the Barcelona Court reduced the sentence to seven months, arguing that the sentencing had expired.

The 2007 Law against Violence, Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance in Sport establishes sanctions, including closures, suspension, and demotion in divisional standings, against teams and stadiums for prohibited actions perpetrated by professional athletic clubs, players, or fans. The law resulted from a long history of fans insulting players based on their race or religion. In September 2008 the Commission levied a \$40,000 (€30,000) fine against the Vallecano soccer for collaborating with an ultra-right group and issuing 53 invitations for the group to attend a sporting event. For the two-year period of 2007-08, the Government sanctioned more than 1,200 parties and levied fines of \$600,000 (€466,000), mostly to individual spectators for inciting or involvement in altercations.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany (January 6), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Assumption (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas (December 25). Many regional governments also establish local religious holidays. In the 1992 cooperation accords with the FCJE and CIE, the Government agreed to recognize Jewish and Islamic holidays and to allow members of both religious groups to (upon agreement by their employer) take Friday afternoons off from work, with pay, to observe the Sabbath. The 1992 accord with FEREDE also accommodates Protestant entities, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, that celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath by giving them Friday afternoon off from work, with pay, to observe the Sabbath.

The Law of Religious Freedom of 1980 implements the constitutional provision for freedom of religion. The 1980 law establishes a legal framework and certain privileges for religious organizations. Religious organizations voluntarily register in the Register of Religious Entities, maintained and regularly updated by the MOJ Office of Religious Affairs. To register with the MOJ, religious groups must submit documentation supporting their claim to be religions. If a group's application is rejected, the group may appeal the decision to the courts. If it is judged not to be a religion, it may be included on a Register of Associations maintained by the Ministry of Interior. Inclusion on the Register of Associations grants legal status as authorized by the law regulating the right of association. Religious groups not officially recognized by the Government have in certain cases been treated as cultural associations.

The first section of the Register of Religious Entities is called the "special section." Catholic entities and those non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities that have a cooperation agreement with the state (Jews, Muslims, and Protestants) register in the special section. Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register to gain benefits under the 1979 cooperation agreement between the Holy See and the Government, since the Episcopal Conference manages the relationship with the Government on behalf of the entire Catholic community.

In general the Government placed no legal restrictions on opening new places of worship; however, representatives of minority religious groups sometimes had difficulty opening places of worship, most frequently because of resistance from neighborhood groups. According to the MOJ Office of Religious Affairs, local governments are obligated to consider requests for land for public use, which may include land for opening places of worship. If a municipality decides to deny such a request, after weighing factors such as availability and the proportionate value added to the community, the city council must explain its decision to the requesting party. Local municipalities sometimes linger over these decisions, with some requests going unanswered for years. The Ministry continued its campaign to educate local governments about their responsibilities to minority religious groups. The Catalan regional government's director of religious affairs drafted a law that sets guidelines for municipalities to provide access to spaces to be used for religious purposes. By the end of the reporting period, the law had not been approved.

The law provides for optional Catholic education in public schools. Muslim and Protestant leaders have called for the Government to provide more support for public religious education in their respective religions, in accordance with the agreements signed with the Government in 1992. In 2004 the Government responded by approving legislation that mandates funding for teachers for courses in Catholic, Islamic, Protestant, and Judaic studies in public schools when at least 10 students request them. The courses are not mandatory. Those students who elect not to take confessional courses are obliged to take an alternative course covering general social, cultural, and religious themes. The development of curriculums and the financing of teachers for religious education, however, is the responsibility of the autonomous communities, with the exception of Andalucía, Aragón, the Basque Country, Las Canarias, Cantabria, and La Rioja, and the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, where religious education is the responsibility of the national Government.

The national entities registered with the MOJ are responsible for the selection of teachers for their particular religion. Either the national Ministry of Education or the regional entity responsible for education certifies teachers' credentials. Teachers must hold teaching degrees, have training in Spanish law, and be fluent in Spanish. For the Muslim community, the Islamic Commission selects religion teachers.

During the 2007-08 academic year, the Government employed 41 teachers of Islam and approximately 15,000 teachers of Catholicism in public schools. UCIDE estimated that there were 120,000 Muslim students who would take classes in Islamic education if possible, requiring a minimum of 314 religion teachers.

In 2006 the Government financed the creation and printing of the first Spanish textbook on Islam to be used by first-grade students. The Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence financed the project developed by UCIDE. Additional editions for higher primary levels were in production. Although the book was available for use by all school districts (as well as the general public through bookstores), its use can be mandated only in the regions where the national Government has jurisdiction over religious education.

There are no restrictions placed on parents who want to provide their children religious home schooling or enroll them in private religious schools.

Although the law favors the Roman Catholic Church in many respects alluded to above, tensions continued between some members of the Government and leaders of the Catholic Church. When the Government announced its plan to introduce a new abortion law providing greater legal protection for women and doctors, the Church responded, holding an open-air Catholic mass that hundreds of thousands of persons attended and Pope Benedict XVI addressed via video. Although Parliament commenced action on easing the abortion law, the law had not been implemented by the end of the reporting period.

Restrictions on Freedom of Religion

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were isolated instances of local and regional government policies that had the effect of restricting some individual religious groups. The Islamic and

Protestant federations continued to report that the building permit process for new mosque and church construction could be difficult and lengthy, especially for building sites in central urban locations. The Islamic Commission reported that sometimes new mosque construction was forced into less visible suburban areas, primarily because of resistance from neighborhood groups. Leaders of the Jewish community also complained about difficulties in securing permits and approvals to construct new places of worship. The municipality of Girona denied permits for the construction of a mosque after 1,500 residents in the prospective neighborhood signed a petition against it. The neighbors argued that the neighborhood was overcrowded and that the mosque would further constrict their mobility. Local authorities claimed that the prospective site did not meet the "complicated" building codes and that it would present problems with "coexistence." A similar argument was made by residents of Ripoll, and a permit was denied because the prospective site's street was too narrow. Complaints from residents in Salt resulted in the closure of the town's mosque in 2008. In Seville Muslims reported having been repeatedly denied land to construct a mosque. Municipal officials initially approved building plans and allocated land in March 2008. After protests, however, the municipality reneged on its promise despite the fact that \$260,000 (€200,000) had already been invested to prepare the land for construction.

While it was reported that FEDERE's president demanded "equal treatment" of Protestants by the Government, the official statement at the conclusion of FEDERE's 2007 Protestant conference focused on the religious group's progress. In mid-April both President Zapatero and Vice President Fernández de la Vega announced that the Government would unveil a "Law of Religious Freedom" reform shortly. Although it was not presented to Parliament by the end of the reporting period, the premise of the reform is to recognize and enforce religious plurality.

The Islamic Cultural Center of Valencia (CCIV) president reported that as of May 2009, there were numerous interviews and discussions with the Valencia city council but no determination on their October 10, 2008, second application (first filed in 2004) for a gratis transfer of land to build an Islamic cultural center with space for prayer and other public services, such as language training (Spanish and Arabic) and vocational courses. According to the CCIV president, the new center was needed to replace CCIV's facilities, which were spread among three properties and insufficient to accommodate needs.

Municipal governments are the competent authority with respect to cemeteries and burials, and religious groups, particularly Muslims, have reported difficulty in

gaining satisfactory treatment and reburial of disinterred remains as well as access to cemeteries designated for particular religions. The national Federation of Jewish Communities created and shared with the MOJ a nonbinding protocol for the national and local governments to follow in addressing such issues. According to the protocol, an agreement is entered into with each individual municipality once it is determined that a cemetery contains Jewish remains, but within the framework agreed upon by the FCJE and MOJ.

In June 2007 construction workers in Tarrega uncovered an ancient Sephardic Jewish cemetery from which the skeletal remains of 158 persons were subsequently disinterred without religious supervision. On July 7, 2008, the FCJE, Barcelona city officials, and officials from the Department of Heritage reached an agreement, and the reburial of all remains was completed.

In October 2008 a Sephardic Jewish cemetery was discovered during construction at a school in Toledo. Local authorities agreed to halt construction pending negotiations amongst interested parties. In late April, the FCJE confirmed that the Toledo government and international rabbinical authorities, with the assistance of the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, had come to an agreement as to the disposition of remains. The negotiated compromise called for the reburial of remains in a portion of what was the original cemetery under supervision of Spanish rabbinical authorities and continuation of construction on the remaining land. The reburial was completed on June 21, 2009.

In November 2008 the MOJ and Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces convened training for municipal officials and intercultural dialogue regarding democratic values and religion, bringing together local and regional authorities with members from all religious faiths to discuss the application of religious freedom within their communities. The two-day dialogue included discussions regarding respect for places of worship, the procedures for obtaining permits to construct or use existing structures as places of worship, and burial sites. Throughout the reporting period, the MOJ reported that it was working to increase cooperation between local governments and Islamic communities to address granting public land for use as cemeteries and for other religious and cultural purposes, because local and municipal governments had the authority to do so.

In its 2009 budget, the Government allocated \$1,115,000 (€20,000) to finance religious assistance for inmates. In 2006 the Council of Ministers provided official guidance regarding the provision of evangelical, Jewish, and Islamic religious services for prisoners inside jails. Muslim leaders reported that prison officials

generally provided access for prayer assistants to visit Muslim prisoners, and according to the MOJ, Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish religious assistance was accessible within prisons. Such a right was established in the 1980 Religious Freedom Law, and inmates receive religious assistance upon request. The Government funds religious assistance for the Catholic and Muslim religious groups within the prison system, but not for Jewish or Protestant groups. This is a reflection of the 1992 bilateral agreements or cooperation agreements entered into between each of the religious groups and the Government. The 1992 cooperation agreements take precedence over the 2006 action taken by the Council of Ministers. According to the 1992 cooperation agreements between the Government and the Jewish and Protestant groups, religious assistance is paid for by the community, not the Government. The Muslim cooperation agreement provides for government funding for religious assistance. In order for the Jewish and Protestant faiths to receive equal funding, the cooperation agreements must be amended or a new law adopted. Amendment of the cooperation agreements is unlikely since, according to the Ministry of Justice, it was initially the groups' decision not to include government funding for such assistance in the agreements.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

On January 27, 2009, government and Jewish community leaders held a ceremony in observance of the Holocaust for the fifth consecutive reporting year in Madrid.

On December 17, 2008, the country became a member of the "Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research." The country became an "invitee" of the Task Force in 2005 and obtained "observer" status in 2006.

On November 25 and 26, 2008, Madrid's first International Seminar on Anti-Semitism took place. According to a 2008 Pew survey entitled "Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Increase in Europe," Spain has the most negative view of Jews of the other Western countries studied (United States,

Britain, France, Poland, Russia, and Germany). The seminar aimed to address anti-Semitism, both within the country and outside its borders and served as an open call to the public to look at the roots and current manifestations of anti-Semitism.

The authorities of Lleida (Catalonia) approved the construction of a new mosque on a 0.5 acre (2,000 square meter) lot in the industrial suburb of Segre. When completed, this 555-person capacity mosque will be the first mosque in Catalonia built in modern times.

On July 16-18, 2008, the Muslim World League (MWL), under the patronage of Saudi King Abdullah, held its interfaith conference in Madrid. Spanish King Juan Carlos hosted the event, and although the guest list was not all-inclusive, there was a wide range of participation including Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, and Shinto followers. The event was described as a "step in the right direction," on the part of the MWL and an important opportunity to open the lines of communication between Muslims and those of other faiths. Subsequently, the MWL and the Holy See appeared to agree on a revised version of the outcome document from the conference, known as the Madrid Declaration. The declaration condemns terrorism, upholds equality regardless of religion, and encourages renewed interreligious dialogue.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in the previous reporting period, there were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Acts of anti-Semitism, including graffiti aimed at Jewish institutions, continued during the reporting period. The growth of the immigrant population at times led to social friction, which in isolated instances had a religious component. Muslims continued to experience some societal prejudice, and some citizens blamed recent immigrants for increased crime rates in the country.

On March 2, 2009, a trial in Barcelona began against the owners of Kalki bookstore and publishing house for allegedly selling books and products of Nazi ideology justifying the Holocaust. The case was ongoing, but the prosecutor requested five- to seven-year jail sentences for the owner of the bookstore, the publishing house, and the president of the Society of Indoeuropean Studies, a Nazi ideological association which disguises itself as a nonprofit group. The prosecutor

is also asking for fines ranging from \$9,500 to \$14,000 (€7,200 to €10,800) for each offender.

On January 30, 2009, a man associated with the extremist "Republican Social Movement" attacked the façade of the Synagogue Shlomo Ben Adret in Barcelona with a bat. He was subsequently detained by the regional police force. On January 8, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on the Chabad Lubavitch Jewish Studies Center of Barcelona. In response to these acts, the president of the autonomous community of Catalonia, where Barcelona is located, promised to put an end to any anti-Semitic acts in Catalonia. He made the statement before the Parliamentary ceremony honoring Holocaust victims and further stated that he was attentive to the need to stop anti-Semitism and pledged to guarantee peaceful habitation to all regardless of beliefs. In response to these acts and demonstrations occurring throughout the country in reaction to the Gaza conflict, Foreign Minister Moratinos warned against anti-Semitism, stating that criticism of Israel should not take anti-Semitic undertones. According to news reports, some representatives of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) participated in "anti-Israel" demonstrations.

Jewish community leaders reported that while violence against Jews was rare, they were concerned about anti-Semitic vandalism and Holocaust denial. In one such case, on December 14, 2008, British Historian David Irving gave a speech entitled "The Other Hitler" in a Barcelona bookstore explaining his theories of Holocaust denial. The Mossos d'Esquadra (local police force) observed the event to ensure that his words did not encourage xenophobic acts or justify genocide. In 2006 Irving was sentenced to three years in jail in Austria for denying the existence of the Holocaust.

In January 2009 the Madrid Association of Atheists and Freethinkers initiated a campaign using municipal buses to advertise its message: "God probably does not exist. Stop worrying and enjoy life." A similar campaign took place in Barcelona during January as well. The Evangelical Church responded to the "anti-God" messages, purchasing competing publicity on a municipal line and espousing the message, "God exists. Enjoy life in Christ."

The Government released the results of its third annual survey of the Muslim community on February 11, 2009. Although 31 percent of those surveyed affirmed the existence of rejection or suspicion of the Muslim faith, 84 percent of respondents said they had encountered no obstacles to practicing their religion in the country. As previously reported, the majority of Muslims were forced to worship in converted buildings, often called "garage mosques," because there were

few buildings dedicated to Islamic worship for their growing numbers, and some locales resisted giving Muslims land and the necessary legal permissions to build.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials also meet with religious leaders of various denominations.

The Embassy continued to facilitate regular exchanges between U.S. and local religious associations to foster dialogue and promote religious tolerance and freedom. Through the Mission's Muslim Engagement Working Group, the Embassy and Barcelona Consulate continued contact with various Muslim communities throughout the country to better understand the challenges and obstacles faced by this population. During the reporting period, the Mission hosted two U.S. Speaker programs--engaging Muslim and non-Muslim audiences in discussions of Islam within the European context--and cosponsored an international conference that resulted in the launch of a European Muslim Media Network. The previous Ambassador hosted an Iftar reception for members of the Muslim community, at which the imam of the Islamic Cultural Center of Madrid and the imam from the Al-Saud Mosque in Marbella presided over the breaking of the day's fast. Also present were several representatives from the Government responsible for religious freedom issues and academic experts in the field of Muslim affairs. The Mission also facilitated contacts between the Interfaith Youth Core, the recipient of a State Department grant to conduct training for young leaders in promoting religious pluralism, and various religious associations, which led to the identification of a partner organization in Barcelona to cohost the event.

In addition to public outreach, embassy and consulate officials intervened formally with the Government on granting appropriate treatment of historic Jewish cemeteries and encouraging the passage of law that would grant all "notorio arraigo" religions equal tax status. The Embassy coordinated meetings between prominent Jewish leaders and governmental authorities to facilitate negotiation concerning the proper disposition of remains in the recently discovered cemetery in Toledo. The ensuing dialogue ensured that the wishes of the Jewish population world-wide were well understood in the context of negotiating the local agreement. Encouraging the Government to follow through on its planned revision of the Law of Religious Freedom that would grant equal tax status to religions, the Embassy repeatedly raised the issue with the Vice President and Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice, and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

SRI LANKA

The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place" and commits the Government to protecting it but does not recognize it as the state religion. The Constitution also provides for the right of members of other religious groups to practice freely their religious beliefs.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Although the Government publicly endorses religious freedom, in practice there were problems in some areas.

There continued to be sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions. There were also attacks on Muslims in the Eastern Province by pro-government Tamil militias; these appeared to be due to ethnic and political tensions rather than to the Muslim community's religious beliefs.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials conveyed U.S. Government concerns about church attacks to government leaders and urged them to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators. Embassy officials also expressed concern to the Government about the negative impact of anticonversion laws on religious freedom. The U.S. Government continued to discuss general religious freedom concerns with religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 25,322 square miles and a population of 20.1 million.

Approximately 70 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent Muslim. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west, Muslims populate the east, and the north is almost exclusively Hindu.

Most members of the majority Sinhala community are Theravada Buddhists. Most Tamils, who make up the largest ethnic minority, are Hindus. Almost all Muslims are Sunnis; there is a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Bohra community. Almost 80 percent of Christians are Roman Catholics, with Anglican and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in cities. Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed,

Anglicans, Pentecostals, and members of the Assemblies of God are also present. Evangelical Christian groups have grown in recent years, although membership is small.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 10 of the Constitution states, "Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice." Article 14(1)(e) gives a citizen "the right either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching."

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has four departments that deal specifically with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian affairs. According to the legislation defining their mandates, each department should formulate and implement programs that inculcate religious values and promote a virtuous society.

Parliament again took no action on "anticonversion" legislation first introduced in 2004. In 2004 the Jathika Hela Urumaya Party (JHU) presented to Parliament a bill that would criminalize "unethical" conversions, and in 2005 the JHU presented the bill for a second reading, despite a Supreme Court ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional. Subsequently, the proposed bill was referred to a special parliamentary committee that reviewed the bill and referred it back to Parliament for the third reading. The JHU indicated it would bring the bill forward again in 2010.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. To conduct financial transactions and open bank accounts, however, they must be incorporated either by an act of Parliament, under the Companies Act as a business, under the Societies Ordinance, or under the Trust Ordinance. Until the 1960s, most churches were either Catholic or Anglican and were incorporated by acts of Parliament. Beginning in the 1970s, as new Christian groups, including evangelical groups, began to emerge in the country, it became more common to register churches under the Companies Act. Over time, evangelical churches have been accused of engaging in "unethical conversions." As a result, the Government has become reluctant to register new religious groups as companies. Evangelical groups report that they find it increasingly difficult to register new churches or to reregister under

the Companies Act. Registration under the Societies or Trust Ordinances limits these churches' ability to conduct certain financial transactions.

Matters related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are adjudicated according to the customary law of the concerned ethnic or religious group. The minimum age of marriage for women is 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continued to follow their customary religious practices of girls attaining marrying age with the onset of puberty and men when they are financially capable of supporting a family.

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, the Government observes a number of major religious festivals of other religious groups as national holidays. These include the Hindu Thai Pongal, New Year, and Deepawali festivals; the Islamic Hadji and Ramzan festivals and the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; and Christian Good Friday and Christmas.

Religion is a mandatory subject in the public school curriculum. Parents and children may choose to study Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. Students who belong to other religious groups can pursue religious instruction outside the public school system. All schools follow the Department of Education curriculums on the subject, which is compulsory for the General Certificate Education Ordinary/Level exams. International schools that follow the London Ordinary/Level syllabus may opt not to teach religious studies in schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Although the Government publicly endorses religious freedom, in practice there were problems in some areas. Foreign clergy may work in the country, but for the last three decades the Government has limited the issuance of temporary work permits. Members of denominations registered formally with the Government could work in the country. Most religious workers in the country were indigenous.

Work permits for foreign clergy were issued for one year rather than five years as in the past; work permits can be extended. In the past, it had become regular practice for many foreign religious workers on development projects to use tourist visas to gain entry without encountering any problems with immigration authorities. During the reporting period, however, government authorities informed some religious workers that they would not be able to continue this

practice. They were not deported formally but instead were encouraged strongly to leave the country.

Some evangelical Christian groups complained of governmental discrimination in the provision of services. These groups reported that state schools refused to accept Christian children or forced the children to study Buddhism and that the Colombo Municipal Council denied free midday meals to Christians who did not belong to the Catholic Church.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since 1983, the Government had battled the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist organization fighting for a separate state for the country's Tamil, and mainly Hindu, minority. In 2001 the Government and the LTTE each announced a unilateral cease-fire, and in 2002 they agreed to a joint cease-fire accord. The peace process stalled in late 2005 following an escalation in violence. In 2006 renewed fighting broke out, and in January 2008 the Government terminated the cease-fire agreement. The conflict formally ended in May 2009. Adherence to a specific set of religious beliefs did not play a significant role in the conflict, which was rooted in linguistic, ethnic, and political differences. The conflict affected Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Since 1983, approximately 100,000 persons had died. The Government, paramilitaries, and Tamil Tigers have been accused of involving religious facilities in the conflict or putting them at risk through shelling in conflict areas. During the final days of fighting in April and May 2009, there were unconfirmed reports both of the LTTE locating artillery pieces next to religious facilities and of the army firing heavy weapons at the same sites, often while they were in use as shelters for civilians.

During the reporting period, security forces committed human rights abuses against individuals at places of worship in the north and east. While these incidents had an impact on religious freedom, they were not religiously motivated; instead, they were a product of the conflict. Since 2006 there were numerous reports of killings and disappearances. Some Catholic priests who spoke out on humanitarian issues were among those who disappeared. There is no evidence that the killings and disappearances that occurred in this area during the reporting period were religiously motivated.

In May 2009 navy personnel and army commandos accompanied by a police officer visited the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka's office in the south part of Colombo (the navy oversees security issues in that neighborhood).

They interrogated the general secretary of the Alliance and his senior staff and searched official documents and the office premises.

In April 2009 Minister Rohitha Abeygunawardene, Member of Parliament for the Kalutara District, informed Pastor Stanley Royston of the Assembly of God (AOG) church that it was the official stance of the Government that churches must close down unless they are registered with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The AOG Church in Kalutara has been functioning for more than 60 years with a congregation of more than 800. While Pastor Royston was inside the local police station reporting attacks on the AOG church, some of the JHU-affiliated monks who had carried out the attacks threatened him with death.

In April 2009 attorneys Faiz Mustapha PC and Asoka Weerasooriya accompanied a delegation from the Assembly of God Church at a meeting with Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa assured the delegation that the churches did not require registration with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, as Minister Rohitha Abeygunewardena had stated. Rajapaksa further added that the Ministry of Religious Affairs would be directed to work out a mechanism of registration. He assured the delegation that attacks on churches would be dealt with and that the law enforcement authorities would be directed to ensure that law and order prevailed, ensuring the rights of citizens to exercise their religious beliefs.

In September 2008 a group of approximately 60 persons led by a Buddhist monk and a local politician arrived at the Prayer Tower Church at Maliankulam in the Puttalam District. They set fire to the partially constructed hall the congregation used as a Sunday school. The group assaulted members of the church who live in the vicinity and who had gone to the scene in an attempt to stop the arson. The attackers threatened children from the congregation who also had gathered. The pastor lodged a complaint at the local police station but was told police would be unable to help, as the attackers were no longer in the village. Around midnight the same day, some of the attackers returned and warned the Christian families not to send their children to the village school the next day or they would be killed. Another church in Puttalam district was the target of an arson attack on August 17, 2008.

In July 2008 local police warned Pastor Royston of the AOG Church in Kalutara not to continue church services. There had been protest rallies against the church in the area, and Royston was asked to report to the local police station. When he arrived there with his lawyer, he was confronted by a group of 50 persons, 10 of

whom were Buddhist monks. The monks said they objected to the presence of the lawyer, and Royston asked him to sit in another room. The monks then asked to see the lawyer's national identity card. When he refused, saying he had no obligation to present it, the monks and the others attempted to assault him, in full view of police. The lawyer was able to evade the attack, but the mob shouted that they would destroy the church. The local police then advised Royston to discontinue church services.

In April 2008 the Bishop of Mannar moved the historic statue of Our Lady of Madhu from Madhu Church to St. Xavier's Church in Thevanpidy to protect it from increasing hostilities between government security forces and the LTTE in the area. The Bishop of Mannar asked the Government and the LTTE to stay at least 1.2 miles away from the church to enable civilian access. After fighting between the government and the LTTE pushed north of the Madhu area, the Bishop of Mannar was able to return the statue to Madhu Church on August 6, 2008. Madhu Church is considered the most important Catholic site in the country.

There were no updates during the reporting period on the April 2008 killing of the Chairman of the North East Secretariat on Human Rights, Father M. X. Karunaratnam, in Vanni (Northern Province).

There were no updates on the March 2008 case filed in the Appeals Court seeking remedy for the revocation of the approval given to the Foursquare Gospel Church in Kelaniya, Gampaha for the construction of a new church building.

There were no updates on the January 2008 killing of UNP parliamentarian T. Maheswaran at a Hindu temple in Kotahena. The main suspect was a former member of Maheswaran's security detail who had connections to the progovernment Tamil party Eelam People's Democratic Party. However, the Inspector General of Police stated the LTTE was responsible.

There were no updates on the October 2007 killing of Pastor Victor Yogarajan and his two sons near Negombo. The three had been missing since March 2007.

There were no updates on the September 2007 killing of Father Nicholaspillai Packiyaranjit, Mannar coordinator of Jesuit Refugee Service, in Mannar.

There were no updates on the September 2007 abduction and killing of Hindu priest Subramaniasharma Ketheswara Kurukkal in Jaffna as he was traveling to visit relatives.

There were no updates on the April 2007 killing of Hindu priest Ratnasabapathy Aiyar Somaskantha in Velanai, Jaffna.

There were no updates on the January 2007 killing of Reverend Nallathamby Gnanaseelan of the Tamil Mission Church of Jaffna by government security forces.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

The U.S. Government has listed the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since 1997. The LTTE has victimized Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians; it does not appear that the victims are selected along religious lines.

In 1990 the LTTE expelled approximately 46,000 Muslim inhabitants, virtually the entire Muslim population in the area, from the northern part of the country. Most of these persons remained displaced and lived in or near welfare centers. Although some Muslims returned to the northern city of Jaffna in 1997, they did not remain there due to the continuing threat the LTTE posed. There were credible reports that the LTTE warned thousands of Muslims displaced from the Mannar area not to return to their homes until the conflict was over. It appears that the LTTE's actions against Muslims were not due to Muslims' religious beliefs but rather that these actions were part of an overall strategy to clear the north and east of persons unsympathetic to the LTTE. The LTTE made some conciliatory statements to the Muslim community, but many Muslims viewed the statements with skepticism. The LTTE later encouraged Muslim internally displaced persons (IDPs) in some areas to return home, asserting they would not be harmed. Although some Muslim IDPs returned home, the majority did not and waited for a government guarantee of safety in LTTE-controlled areas. Since the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, the LTTE also carried out a number of attacks in the east in which Muslims were killed. No arrests had been made in these cases by the end of the reporting period. Although the Government defeated the LTTE militarily in May 2009, it remained

unclear whether these Muslim citizens would soon be able to return to their former homes.

The LTTE has been accused of using church and temple compounds, many of which the Government designated as shelters in the event of hostilities, for the storage of munitions.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Discrimination based on religious differences was much less common than discrimination based on ethnicity. In general, members of the various religious groups tended to be tolerant of each other's religious beliefs. However, allegations by Buddhist extremists of Christian involvement in "unethical" or forced conversions continued to be a source of tension between the two communities. Christians denied the charges, responding that people undergo conversion of their own free will. There were reports that members of some evangelical groups made disparaging comments about Buddhism while evangelizing. Some groups also alleged that Christians engaged in aggressive proselytism and took advantage of societal ills such as general poverty, war, and lack of education. Christians countered that their relief efforts were not aimed at converting aid beneficiaries.

During the reporting period, Christians of all groups sometimes encountered harassment and physical attacks on property and places of worship by some local Buddhists who were opposed to conversion and believed the Christian groups threatened them. Some Christian groups occasionally complained that the Government tacitly condoned harassment and violence aimed at them. Police generally provided protection for these groups at their request. In some cases police response was inadequate, and local police officials reportedly were reluctant to take legal action against individuals involved in the attacks. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reported numerous attacks on Christian churches, organizations, religious leaders, or congregants, many of which were reported to the police. Credible sources confirmed some of these attacks. A general increase in the number of attacks on churches, particularly in the south, occurred in April and May of 2008. The most severe attack was in Talangama, Colombo District, when Buddhist monks led mobs attacking the Calvary Church, destroying the building and severely injuring the pastor. No arrests were made following these attacks.

On June 23, 2009, a group of men on motorcycles attacked the pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Polonnaruwa with knives, attempting to slash his

neck. The local police conducted inquiries, but no arrests had been made by the end of the reporting period. At the end of the reporting period, the pastor had a police escort for his protection.

On June 13, 2009, two Catholic shrines were attacked in Hingurakgoda and Polonnaruwa.

On June 7, 2009, a mob attacked and destroyed the Apostolic Church in Mannar. Seven persons were arrested, and an action was filed in the local Magistrates Court.

On June 6, 2009, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor from the Vavuniya region was planning to return home by bus from Colombo after attending a conference. He telephoned his wife in Vavuniya to tell her he was getting on the bus but never arrived home. He had been abducted once before in November 2008 and released shortly afterward.

On June 3, 2009, the Catholic National Association of the Laity of Sri Lanka reported the vandalism of a 10-year-old statue of Jesus Christ at the Catholic Convent Prasadani, in Minneriya. Another statue of Christ that belonged to a family in Minneriya was removed and smashed.

During the week of April 8, 2009, Jeevanaloka Sabhawa (an independent local Christian church) in Weeraketiya, Hambanthota District, experienced a number of threats. On April 8 four men stood outside the pastor's house shouting, "Christian come out," frightening his wife and two children, who were home alone. He returned home soon after, then received a telephone call threatening him with death unless he left the village by morning. The caller, reportedly one of the four who had been seen outside the home, made several more threatening calls to the pastor that night. He then returned to the pastor's home, pounding on the door and demanding that the pastor come outside. The man continued his verbal harassment until the police arrived and placed him under arrest. The next day police released the suspect from custody, and he started a petition against the church with help from other villagers and several Buddhist temples in the area. The owner of the pastor's house was warned to evict the pastor or face serious damage to the property. The pastor's children were relocated for their protection. The church canceled Good Friday and Easter Sunday worship services as a precautionary measure, and the pastor continued to be informed of plots to attack him.

On April 5, 2009, an unidentified gang broke into the Methodist Church in Pepiliyana, Dehiwela, Colombo District. Once inside the 150-year-old church, the intruders looted valuable musical instruments, Bibles, hymnals, and documents, including baptism and marriage records. Church sources believed the deliberate removal of church documents, which had no monetary value, indicated the motive was not robbery. The incident occurred the night after the church had celebrated Palm Sunday with a traditional procession. The Boralesgamuwa Police were investigating.

In April 2009 Christians in several congregations in Kommatalamadu and Amanthanveli in Vakara, Batticaloa District, experienced problems conducting worship services due to threats. The majority Hindu villagers chased away a pastoral worker visiting Christian families.

In March 2009 a protest rally took place against the Calvary Prayer Centre at Udugampola, Gampaha District, claiming the church was engaged in kidnapping youth. Police protection was provided to deter violent incidents during the protest.

In March 2009 a man wielding a machete attacked an assistant pastor and a church worker of the Vineyard Community Church at Pannala in Kurunegala District. A complaint was made to the Pannala police. According to the senior pastor, police visited the scene of the crime but made no arrests.

From January to March 2009, the Assembly of God Church in Bulathkohupitiya, Kegakalle District, came under threat. Mobs verbally abused members of the congregation and prevented them from attending Sunday worship service. The instigators of the mobs and a number of Buddhist monks from the area petitioned the Ministry of Religious Affairs to close the church. These groups have also held meetings in the village to discuss closing the church.

In January 2009 a report by a commission appointed by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) on conversion of Buddhists to other religions was released. The ACBC appointed the commission in 2006 to investigate what it termed unethical conversions, including activities of NGOs and other charitable organizations. Allegations leveled against Christian churches and organizations during these proceedings ranged from alleged unethical conversions through material inducement to allegations of supporting terrorism.

In September 2008 a Buddhist monk and three associates desecrated the Sri Muthumariamman Temple in Grandpass, Colombo. They entered the temple at

night through the roof, smashing the New Goddess statue, Lord Vishnu statue, Lord Rama statue, and the Lord Shivalingam statue. Residents alerted the police, who arrested the four intruders. They were brought before the Colombo Additional Magistrate Court, where they were remanded into custody but later released on bail. The leader of the group was identified as Sri Sapugasyaye Dhammanada Thero, the chief incumbent of a major Buddhist temple complex in Grandpass.

In August 2008 an Assembly of God Church at Pannaladi, Norochcholai, Puttalam District, was set on fire and destroyed. A group of persons who had visited the local pastor's house earlier that evening and threatened him was suspected of having carried out the arson. A police complaint was filed, and three persons were arrested but later released on bail.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials regularly meet with representatives of all the country's religious groups to review a wide range of human rights, ethnic, and religious freedom concerns. During the reporting period, Embassy representatives met with government officials at the highest level to express U.S. Government concern about the attacks on Christian churches and to discuss the anticonversion issue.

The U.S. Government is a strong supporter of political reconciliation now that the conflict has ended, and the U.S. Embassy supports interfaith efforts by religious leaders to promote a peaceful resolution of the underlying causes of the conflict.

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 104 square miles and a population of 40,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. An estimated 50 percent of the population adheres to Anglican beliefs, and 25 percent is Roman Catholic. Methodists, Moravians, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and members of the Baha'i Faith are also present. Evangelical Christian groups are gaining followers. There is no organized Jewish community.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government is secular and did not interfere with an individual's right to worship.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the registration of religious groups.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

There were two Catholic schools and a Seventh-day Adventist school. The Government did not contribute financially to these schools. The Government requires all schools to conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools. There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The St. Kitts Christian Council, which included Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and other traditional Christian religious groups, conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and respect among adherents of different Christian traditions. The Evangelical Association united 11 churches in the evangelical community and promoted their interests. The local university hosted (and the Government supported) an interfaith service that brought together Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Rastafarian, and other religious practitioners.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SAINT LUCIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 238 square miles and a population of 160,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. According to the 2001 population and housing census, Roman Catholics account for approximately 67 percent of the population. The second largest group is Seventh-day Adventists, representing almost 9 percent of the population, followed by Pentecostals, with nearly 6 percent. Evangelicals and Anglicans each account for approximately 2 percent of the population, while Baptists and Methodists represent smaller percentages.

The number of non-Christians is very small. There are an estimated 350 Muslims; while some are immigrants from other Caribbean countries, the Middle East, and South Asia, most Muslims are local converts. Other religious groups include Baha'is and Rastafarians; according to the 2001 census, Rastafarians numbered approximately 3,500 members or an estimated 2 percent of the population. Nearly 5 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian Council, an organization consisting representatives of the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government continued revising its registration policy for religious groups, which was pending at the end of the reporting period. The Government suspended all applications for formal registration as a religious group until completion of this process. This moratorium affected the Muslim community, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 10 other organizations. Official recognition allows a religious organization to have duty-free import privileges and the right to register births, marriages, and deaths within the community. Any citizen can register life events with the Government; however, registration of a religious group allows its officials to act in this capacity as well. While awaiting registration, religious groups had the freedom to meet and worship according to their beliefs.

The public school curriculum includes Christian education; however, non-Christian students are not required to participate. There also are private schools sponsored by the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Some tension existed between the historically dominant Catholic Church and the rapidly growing evangelical groups, some of which allegedly criticized the Catholic Church during their proselytizing efforts.

Although Rastafarian leaders acknowledged that intolerance was gradually decreasing, they complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 150 square miles and a population of 119,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. According to the 2001 census, the Anglican Church and Pentecostal congregations each consist of approximately 19,000 members; the Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, and Baptist churches each have 11,000 adherents; 8,000 citizens are Roman Catholic; and Rastafarians number approximately 1,500 persons. Other religious groups, such as Church of God, other evangelical groups, Baha'is, and Jehovah's Witnesses are present.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.

Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity; however, attendance is not mandatory. Representatives from different religious groups, especially Anglican and Catholic, are occasionally

invited to speak to students. Teachers may provide information on other religious groups.

The Government occasionally organizes interfaith services through the Christian Council, an organization consisting of the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist Churches, and the Salvation Army.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools. There were no other reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Both the Christian Council of Churches and Association of Evangelical Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and respect among different Christian denominations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SUDAN

The Interim National Constitution (INC) provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire country. The INC enshrines Shari'a as a source of legislation in the north, however, and the official laws and policies of the Government of National Unity (GNU) favor Islam in the north. The Constitution of Southern Sudan provides for freedom of religion in the south, and other laws and policies of the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Although the GNU generally did not vigorously enforce its strictest restrictions on religious freedom, it generally did not respect religious plurality in the north. The GoSS generally respected religious freedom in the 10 states of the south. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by either the GNU or the GoSS during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and religious prejudices remained prevalent throughout the country.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern annually under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The most recent re-designation occurred on January 16, 2009.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 967,500 square miles and a population of 41.1 million. An estimated four-fifths of the population live in the 15 states of the north and are generally from Arabic-speaking Semitic groups. The remaining one-fifth of the population lives in the south and is mostly Nilotic.

An estimated 70 percent of the population is Muslim. Islam is the predominant religion in the north. Almost all Muslims are Sunni, although there are significant distinctions between followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi brotherhoods.

An estimated 25 percent of the population holds indigenous beliefs (animism), which are prevalent in rural areas throughout the country. Some animists have been baptized but they either do not identify themselves as Christians or combine Christian and animist practices.

Christians are the third-largest religious group, traditionally concentrated in the south and the Nuba Mountains. Khartoum has a significant Christian population, in part because of migration during the long civil war. The Roman Catholic Church of Sudan and the Episcopal Churches of Sudan estimate they have six million and five million baptized followers, respectively, although active churchgoers are far fewer.

There are very small but long-established groups of Orthodox Christians in Khartoum and other northern cities, including Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox. There are also Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities, largely made up of refugees and migrants, in Khartoum and the east. Other Christian groups with smaller followings include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian (Apostolic) Church, Sudan Church of Christ, Sudan Interior Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (in the north), Presbyterian Church of the Sudan (in the south), and the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Sudan.

Religion plays a prominent role in the complex system of political alliances. Northern Muslims have dominated the political and economic system since independence in 1956. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the GNU has appointed both Muslims and Christians to prominent executive positions.

The dominant political power, the National Congress Party (NCP), draws its support from conservative Arab Muslims in the north. Northern opposition parties draw their support from different Sufi brotherhoods: the Umma Party is closely connected with Arab followers of the Ansar sect, and the Democratic Unionist Party with the Khatmia sect. Opposition parties typically include non-Arab Muslims from the north, east, and Darfur regions.

Following the civil war, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) became the dominant political power in the south and is the main coalition partner with the ruling NCP in the GNU. The SPLM draws its support from Southern Christians but regularly engages with Muslim opposition parties and rebel groups in Darfur and the east.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The INC provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire country, but disparities in the legal treatment of religious minorities exist between the north and south. The INC preserves Shari'a as a source of legislation in the north. The Constitution of Southern Sudan provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies of the GoSS contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The INC and the Constitution of Southern Sudan both deny recognition to any political party that discriminates on the basis of religion. There are no legal remedies to address constitutional violations of religious freedom by governmental or private actors.

Although there is no penalty for converting from another religion to Islam, converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by imprisonment and even death in the north; however, the GNU has never carried out a death sentence for apostasy.

Blasphemy and defaming Islam are punishable by imprisonment in the north, although these restrictions are rarely enforced. Authorities in the north occasionally subject converts to intense scrutiny, ostracism, or intimidation, or encourage them to leave the country. In the south, there are no penalties for apostasy, blasphemy, or defaming religion, and proselytizing is common.

The GNU has codified limited aspects of Shari'a into criminal and civil laws, with penalties dependent on the religion of the accused. For instance, the consumption of alcohol is punishable by 40 lashes for a Muslim and 20 lashes for a Christian.

The GNU supports Islam by providing funds for mosque construction throughout the north. The GNU also exerts influence over the established Muslim hierarchy by retaining the right to appoint and dismiss imams in most mosques in the north.

In the north, the GNU observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Coptic Easter, Israa Wal Mi'Raaj, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, and Christmas. In the south, the GoSS observes traditional Christian holidays but does not observe Islamic holy days.

The law requires religious groups to register with the GNU as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), although this requirement is not enforced. Religious organizations must register as nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations to claim exemption from taxes and import duties. All religious groups must obtain permits from the national Ministry of Guidance and Social Endowments, the state Ministry of Construction and Planning, and the local planning office before constructing new houses of worship.

Shari'a apostasy penalties within the legal code limit Christian missionary activities in the north. The GNU customarily delayed for long periods the issuance of visas to foreigners affiliated with international faith-based organizations. The GoSS does not restrict the presence of foreign missionaries and does not require them to register.

Under the state-mandated curriculum, all schools in the north are required to teach Islamic education classes from preschool through university. All classes must be taught in Arabic, although English may be taught as a foreign language. Public schools are not required to provide any religious instruction to non-Muslims, and some public schools excuse non-Muslims from Islamic education classes. Private schools must hire a special teacher for teaching Islamic education, even in Christian schools. Christian leaders cited these requirements as exacerbating problems in the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority and as further marginalizing the place of Christianity in northern society.

National government offices and businesses in the north follow the Islamic workweek, with Friday as a day of prayer. Employers are required by law to give their Christian employees two hours before 10 a.m. on Sunday for religious purposes. In practice, many employers did not comply, and there was no legal remedy. Public schools are in session on Sunday and Christian students are not excused from classes. Instead, most Christians worship on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday evening.

GoSS offices and businesses in the south follow the Monday-through-Friday workweek, with Sunday as a day of religious observance. Employers in the south generally do not give their Muslim employees two hours on Friday for religious purposes as required by national law. Schools in the south are in session on Friday, and Muslim students are not excused from class.

The Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital provided a forum for dialogue on religious freedom matters. The commission provides a

mechanism to address issues such as those involving non-Muslims arrested for violating Shari'a.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the GNU generally did not vigorously enforce its strictest restrictions on religious freedom, it generally did not respect religious plurality in the north. The GoSS generally respected religious freedom in the 10 states of the south. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by either the GNU or the GoSS during the reporting period.

The GNU restricted foreigners from entering the country expressly for Christian missionary work, but it permitted foreign Christian leaders to enter in support of their local congregations, such as the Reverend Franklin Graham's visit to Darfur in April 2009. The Humanitarian Affairs Committee routinely expelled foreign workers of international aid organizations, although several U.S.-based Christian aid organizations maintained large operations throughout the north.

Overwhelmingly Muslim in composition, the ruling NCP favors members of its political and tribal clique. Opposition political parties, often composed of adherents of different Sufi sects and non-Arab northern Muslims, are systematically excluded from the political process and national policymaking. Although the INC and the Constitution of Southern Sudan specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion for candidates for the National Civil Service, the selection process favored party members and friends of the NCP.

Christian leaders acknowledged that they usually refrained from preaching on political or other sensitive topics. Some Muslim imams avoided political topics in their preaching as well. The GoSS did not appear to monitor religious activities at mosques or churches in the south.

Anti-Semitic rhetoric is common in both the official media and statements by NCP officials.

Many southern Christians living in the north are economic migrants and are subject to social, educational, and job discrimination.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 27, 2009, local officials in Chat, a Nuba Mountains village, allegedly led a mob that razed a building used by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Sudanese Church of Christ. The attack was reportedly in response to the International Criminal Court's decision to prosecute President al-Bashir.

On February 1, 2009, the GNU's Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC) expelled the U.S. NGO Thirst No More from Darfur on the basis that it was not a legitimate humanitarian aid organization. Authorities accused the NGO of engaging in Christian proselytizing among Muslims in Darfur, an act forbidden by law. As proof of their claim, HAC authorities claimed the offices of Thirst No More in El Fasher contained 3,400 Arabic-language Bibles.

Religious tensions between Muslims and Christians in Southern Kordofan simmered in February 2009 when two local members of the NCP-aligned Popular Defense Force (PDF) threatened to kill a local Presbyterian church leader, according to the UN. On March 1, 2009, PDF members interrupted a church service and threatened further destruction after breaking the cross on the church's roof. On March 7, the Episcopal church in Shatt Mazarik was the target of an arson attack, and on March 21, there was a similar attack on the Catholic church in Shatt Dammam. Church leaders reported to the UN that Kadugli police took no action to investigate the crimes. On March 29, following fighting between the PDF and the SPLA, the Southern Kordofan State Legislative Council held a special session to address the mounting religious and ethnic tensions in the area.

The ongoing conflict in Darfur between the government-backed Arab Muslim militias (janjaweed) and non-Arab Muslim rebels does not center on religious differences but rather on political, economic, and ethnic issues.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States. There is, however, considerable social pressure on non-Muslims in the north to convert to Islam.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government did not engage in severe abuses of religious freedom.

Unlike in prior reporting periods, Christian churches in the north reported that they held regular religious services and large holiday celebrations without government interference.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; and religious prejudices remained prevalent.

Muslims in the north who expressed an interest in Christianity or converted to Christianity faced severe social pressure to recant.

Some universities continued to encourage students to pressure women to wear headscarves to classes, although social pressure for women to wear headscarves in public in the north decreased overall.

In April 2009 the Government executed eight persons in connection with the September 2006 killing of Mohamed Taha, the Shi'a editor-in-chief of *Al Wafaq* daily newspaper who published a controversial article about the origins of the Prophet Muhammad.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government encouraged respect for religious freedom in its discussions with the GNU and urged it to fulfill the promise of religious freedom made in the CPA and the INC. The U.S. Government made clear that respect for religious freedom is crucial to improved relations between the two countries.

U.S. embassy officials met regularly with leaders from Muslim and Christian groups in Khartoum, Juba, and elsewhere, noting the importance of religious tolerance and the extent of U.S. interest and concern.

Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern annually under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The most recent re-designation occurred on January 16, 2009. As the action under the IRFA, the Secretary designated the use of the voice and vote of the U.S. to oppose any loan or other use of the funds of international financial institutions to or for the country consistent with 1621 of the International Financial Institutions Act, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

SURINAME

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 63,037 square miles and a population of 493,000. According to the 2004 census, an estimated 27 percent of the inhabitants trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, 18 percent identify themselves as Creoles of African descent, 15 percent claim Indonesian ancestry, and 15 percent are of Maroon descent (descendants of escaped slaves). Smaller percentages claim Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, or Dutch descent.

According to the most recent official census data (2004), 40.7 percent of the population is Christian, including Roman Catholics and Protestant groups, among them Moravian, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, evangelical, Baptist, and Methodist; 20 percent is Hindu; 13.5 percent is Muslim; and 3.3 percent follow indigenous religions. Baha'is, Jews, Buddhists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and adherents of the World Islamic Call Society are also present.

Indigenous religions are practiced by the Amerindian and Afro-descendant Maroon populations. The Amerindians, concentrated principally in the interior and to a lesser extent in coastal areas, practice shamanism through a medicine man (piaiman). Maroons, who inhabit the interior, worship nature through a practice that has no special name. Maroons, as well as some Creoles in urban areas, worship their ancestors through a rite called wintie. Citizens of Amerindian and

Maroon origin who identify themselves as Christian often follow indigenous religious customs also, with the tacit approval of their Christian church leaders.

There is a correlation between ethnicity and religious faith. Many political parties, including six of the eight governing coalition parties, have strong ethnic ties, and members tend to belong to the same religious group. For example, within the governing coalition, the majority of the membership of the mostly ethnic-Creole National Party of Suriname (NPS) is Moravian, members of the mostly ethnic-Indian United Reformed Party are Hindu, and those of the mostly ethnic-Javanese Pertjaja Luhur Party tend to be Muslim. However, parties have no requirement that political party leaders or members adhere to a particular religion. For example, the President of the country, who is also the leader of the NPS, is a practicing Catholic.

There is no direct correlation between religious affiliation and socioeconomic status; however, those who practice indigenous religions in the small villages of the interior generally have a lower socioeconomic status. With the exception of those following indigenous practices, religious communities are not concentrated in any particular region.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Constitution permits individuals to choose or change their religion. The Constitution categorizes the right to religious freedom as a "personal right and freedom" and states that any violation of these personal freedoms can be brought before a court of justice. The Government does not favor a particular religion, and no tenets of a particular religion were codified into criminal or civil laws.

The Government observes Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Eid al-Fitr (Islamic), and Christmas (Christian) as national holidays. Persons of all religious groups tend to celebrate these holidays.

The Government does not establish requirements for recognition of religious groups, nor are they required to register.

Religious instruction in public schools is permitted but not required. Schools offer religious instruction in a variety of faiths. Parents are not permitted to homeschool their children for religious or other reasons; however, they may enroll their children in private schools, many of which have a religious affiliation. Students in public schools are allowed to practice all elements of their religion, including wearing religious symbols; however, school administrators allegedly told some Rastafarian students wearing dreadlocks was unwelcome.

The Government provides limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by various religious organizations. While the teachers are civil servants and the schools are public, religious groups provide all funding, with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend for the schools.

The armed forces maintain a chaplaincy with Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy available to military personnel of all religious groups. While the chaplaincy provides interfaith services, personnel are also welcome to attend outside religious services.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The interreligious council is composed of representatives of various religious groups. Council members meet at least twice per month to discuss planned interfaith activities and their position on government policies. The council is partially supported by, and consults with, the Government.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SWAZILAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 6,700 square miles and a population of 1 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. An influential Roman Catholic presence includes many churches, schools, and other infrastructure. The 2007 Demographic and Health Survey found that the population 15-49 years old is 37 percent Zionist, 21 percent mainline Protestant, 14 percent Charismatic, 7 percent Apostolic, 5 percent Catholic, and 3 percent Pentecostal; 11 percent described itself as having no religion. The remaining 2 percent is divided among the Baha'i Faith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, Islam, African traditional churches, and others. Mainline Protestant denominations include Anglican, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopalian, and Methodist. Muslims and Baha'is generally live in urban areas. Most immigrants from South Asia practice Islam.

Zionist and Pentecostal churches are growing quickly, perhaps because of the influence of the royal family, many of whom are preachers and church leaders.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Article 23 of the Constitution states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." The Constitution protects the right to practice by guaranteeing "[the] freedom [to] worship either alone or in community with others."

Apart from the Constitution, there is no law, statute, or regulation that protects the right of religious freedom or provides effective remedies for the violation of that right.

Teaching of Religious Knowledge is mandatory in primary school and is an elective subject in secondary and high schools; it is limited to Christian theology. The only organized religious youth clubs permitted to operate in schools are Christian. However, the Government did not enforce this rule, and non-Christian groups registered no complaints regarding this practice during the reporting period.

Portions of the capital are zoned specifically for places of worship. Government permission is required for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and permission is required from chiefs in rural areas. Religious groups that wish to construct new buildings may purchase a plot of land and apply for the required building permits. The Government does not restrict religious groups with financial means from building places of worship; however, non-Christian groups sometimes experience bureaucratic delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy.

Christian programming is available on both of the parastatal broadcast outlets, Swazi Broadcasting and Information Service (SBIS) and Swazi Television; however, government-owned television and radio stations do not grant non-Christian religious groups airtime for broadcasting, a source of complaints from minority religious groups. These groups claimed that SBIS did not respond to their request letters, that the Ministry of Home Affairs or SBIS told them they must receive permission from the Conference of Churches, and that their requests for meetings with the Conference of Churches and relevant government officials were ignored.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas. Although Easter Sunday is not officially considered a national holiday, persons who work on that day draw holiday pay.

The monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many Christian activities. It has become common practice for the King, the Queen Mother, and other members of the royal family to attend evangelical programs, including Good Friday and Easter weekend services. At such services, the King is usually afforded the opportunity to preach.

There is no legislation describing the organizational requirements of a religious group; however, under the Protection of Names and Badges Act 10/69, new religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered "organized," the group should submit its application through one of the country's three umbrella religious bodies: the League of Churches, Conference of Swaziland Churches, or Council of Swaziland Churches. The Government prefers for newly formed churches to be referred and recommended by one of these bodies before the Ministry of Home Affairs considers its registration. However, the Government allows religious groups that do not belong to any of the three bodies to register. After an organization is recommended, the Registrar General's Office in the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs will register the organization. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider proof of a religious leader, congregation, and a place of worship as grounds to grant organized status. Organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, although they are not considered tax-deductible charities.

The Government allows religious instruction, primarily Christian, in public schools. Voluntary school clubs conducted daily prayer services in many public schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Church-related land disputes and rivalries between branches of some sects resulted in violence, sometimes deadly, and arson.

All three of the above-mentioned Christian umbrella organizations were open to all Christian groups. These groups primarily collaborated on common rural development and missionary strategies, although they sometimes strongly disagreed with one another.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SWEDEN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 173,732 square miles and a population of 9.3 million.

There are numerous religious groups. The Government does not register the religion of citizens--it relies on statistics submitted by religious organizations when they apply for annual state funds.

Religious membership or affiliation is concentrated in a few major denominations. According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), an estimated 72.9 percent of citizens are members; other Protestant groups total approximately 4.4 percent (400,000 persons) of the population. Membership in the Church of Sweden has decreased steadily since it separated from the state in 2000. During 2008, 49,757 members left the Church (0.8 percent of registered members). Church-led studies found that individuals left primarily for economic reasons: membership carries a tax on income, normally less than 1 percent (separated members can still attend services.) In 2008 the Church baptized 59 percent of all children born in the country, a figure that has steadily declined over the past two decades. Fewer than 34 percent of 15-year-olds were confirmed in 2008; 80 percent were in 1970. The Church married 44 percent of all couples, compared to 61.1 percent in 2000.

Approximately 5 percent (450,000-500,000) of the population is Muslim, although the officially sanctioned Muslim Council of Sweden, for government funding purposes, reported only 106,327 active participants.

Religious communities representing fewer than 5 percent of the population include the Pentecostal movement, the Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The number of Jews is approximately 20,000. The Jewish community estimates that there are 8,000 practicing members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues, found mostly in the cities. Large numbers of Jews attend High Holy Day services, and the synagogues normally also fill up for weekly services.

Smaller communities are concentrated in larger cities and include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Hare Krishna, Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, and the Unification Church.

It is against the law for the Government to register the faith of individuals; therefore, there are no statistics on correlation between religious groups and socioeconomic status. However, large numbers of immigrants are found at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale.

Certain religions are closely tied to immigrant groups, including the large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination and the Orthodox Christian churches attended by Syrians, Serbs, Greeks, Romanians, and Macedonians. Nearly all Roman Catholics are first or second-generation immigrants, from southern Europe, Latin America, and Poland. Within the Stockholm Catholic Diocese, the Armenian, Chaldean, Maronite, Melchite, and Syrian churches celebrate Mass in their respective languages, as do the Polish, Croatian, Spanish, Italian, Eritrean, Vietnamese, Korean, and Ukrainian communities. The majority of immigrants from the Middle East are Muslim and attend services in Arabic. Members of the more common religious communities tend to be concentrated in the three largest cities. While services in Christian churches generally are poorly attended, many persons observe major church festivals and prefer religious ceremonies to mark turning points in life such as weddings and funerals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Hate-speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on several factors, including religious belief.

Since the official separation of church and state in 2000, eight recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raise revenues through member contributions made through the national tax system. These include the Swedish Missionary Church, Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Alliance Mission, Baptist Union of Sweden, Salvation Army, Methodist Church in Sweden, Pentecostal Church, and the Evangelist Church. All recognized denominations are entitled to direct government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or a combination of both. The state does not favor the Church of Sweden over other religious groups.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Sunday, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and Boxing Day. Students from minority religious backgrounds may observe their respective religious holidays.

Recognition or registration is not required to carry out religious activity. Religious groups that want to receive government aid may apply for it. In reviewing such applications, the Government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment but applies no other criteria. The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities is a government body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Twenty-two registered religious groups (39 including subgroups) are entitled to government aid. In 2008 approximately \$6,059,500 (48,476,000 SEK) was distributed to religious communities in the country.

Religious education covering all major religions is compulsory in public schools. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools (all of which receive government subsidies through the school voucher system), which must adhere to government guidelines on core academic curriculum.

The Ombudsman on Discrimination (DO) is an independent government authority. On January 1, 2009, a reorganization was carried out and four Ombudsmen, working on different types of discrimination, were gathered in a new agency. The mandate of the new DO is to ensure that discrimination relating to, among other things, ethnic origin,

religion, or other belief, does not occur. To that end, it has three principal duties: to educate against discrimination; assist individuals who have suffered discrimination; and supervise employers, institutes of higher education, and other schools to ensure that they fulfill relevant requirements of the law and combat discrimination through targeted and proactive measures.

The Living History Forum--a government authority established in 2003 to promote tolerance, democracy, and human rights using the Holocaust as a starting point--promotes national educational programs on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism. In 2006 the forum initiated an ongoing educational exhibition, "Sweden and the Holocaust," which continued to tour nationwide. The educational campaign, Anne Frank & I, that the forum started in 2006 and which targets high school students, continued. From November 2008 to May 2009 the exhibit was displayed at Varmland's Museum. The exhibit was scheduled to tour countrywide during 2009-10. Additionally, the Living History Forum together with the Association for the Survivors of the Holocaust continued their "Tell the Future" project, which aimed to carry on the memory of the Holocaust by having survivors tell their stories to 17-to-35 year-olds.

The Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The Stockholm County police has a hate crime unit to train police officers to detect, raise awareness of, and inform the public of hate crimes. The unit began on a trial basis in June 2007; in April 2009 it became permanent and expanded to the entire county. Representatives from the unit visit high schools to raise awareness of hate crimes and how to report them, and by their presence to encourage more victims to report abuse. Information for victims of hate crimes has been made available in several languages, and interpreters are provided to facilitate reporting. However, the unit noted that victims, especially of anti-Semitic crimes, choose not to report incidents due to privacy concerns.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

According to law, the slaughter of an animal must be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize its suffering. The Muslim community was split over whether certain anesthetic methods conflict with halal requirements. In April 2006

the Animal Protection Authority issued a report on animal slaughter that recommended the current law be maintained.

The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, for boys under the age of 2 months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW). The NBHW has certified mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to perform the operations but requires that an anesthesiologist or other medical doctor accompany them. Some Jews and Muslims claimed the law interferes with their religious traditions. In April 2009 the Swedish Association of Local Authorities recommended that all county clinics offer circumcision, even if not medically indicated, to prevent botched "home" circumcisions. Approximately 3,000 boys annually are circumcised in the country, but only 1,000 such operations were performed in hospitals.

Individuals serving in the military are given the opportunity to fulfill religious requirements. The military offers food options complying with religious dietary restrictions and allows time off for appropriate mourning periods. Some regiments have an imam to facilitate religious observance by Muslim soldiers. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Citizens were generally tolerant of diverse religious practices. However, anti-Semitism existed, and Muslims were subject to Islamophobic crimes and societal discrimination. Law enforcement authorities maintained statistics on hate crimes. Strong anti-Semitic views among resident Muslims existed.

In June 2009 the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention presented its annual study on hate crimes, including anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, and a new section on other religion-related hate crimes. During 2008 there were approximately 600 reported cases,

45 percent Islamophobic, 26 percent anti-Semitic, and 28 percent related to other religions. Since 2000 approximately 130 anti-Semitic crimes have been reported annually. In 2008 there were 159 reported cases, an increase of 41. Islamophobic crimes increased to 272 cases, compared to 206 in 2007. Reportedly 12 percent of all the religion-related hate crimes in 2008 had a white-supremacy motive. The report also stated that among hate crimes with a religion-related motive, offences aimed at individuals such as illegal threats and "agitation against an ethnic group" were the most common.

The most frequent anti-Semitic crimes were "agitation against an ethnic group," with 37 reported incidents in 2008, and 80 reported cases of "unlawful threat or molestation." Half of the Islamophobic crimes, 138 cases, included "molestation or unlawful threat." Nazi symbols, such as Hitler salutes and swastikas, were associated with 32 percent of reported anti-Semitic cases. According to the report, one-third of anti-Semitic crimes were ideologically motivated, while only 7 percent of Islamophobic crimes were. Religious hate crimes more frequently took place in school or at work. The perpetrator was rarely known to the victim, and men were more often both the suspect and the victim. Sixty-one percent of Islamophobic cases and 75 percent of anti-Semitic cases from 2007 had been concluded by March 2009.

In December 2008 when the situation in Gaza escalated, numerous demonstrations occurred in the country. The majority of protesters expressed anti-Israel sentiments. The Jewish community reported an increase in anti-Semitism, and the police raised its security preparedness level. Debates regarding what constitutes expression of anti-Israel sentiment vs. anti-Semitism created headlines domestically. One of the incidents was in March 2009 in Malmo city, the location of a Davis Cup tennis match between the country and Israel. Local politicians decided to hold the matches without spectators for security reasons. The decision sparked a public debate in which some argued the event should be canceled. A nonviolent demonstration was organized, but hooliganism and some neo-Nazi disturbances occurred.

On January 2 and January 5, 2009, attempts were made to set a synagogue on fire in Helsingborg; the building was severely damaged. On January 5, vandals attempted to set on fire the funeral chapel at the Jewish cemetery in Malmo.

In January 2009 at the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm, in addition to spray-painted graffiti condemning the Gaza incursion, graffiti on the wall equated the Star of David with the swastika. Police increased security measures outside the embassy.

The Jewish community in Stockholm reported that several of its members received threats via e-mail, text messages, and phone calls. Anti-Semitic statements increased on Swedish blogs and internet forums.

In December 2008 neo-Nazis again commemorated the 2000 slaying of neo-Nazi Daniel Wrestrom by carrying out their annual march in Salem.

In December 2008 Muslim youths in a suburb of Malmo clashed with police over a three-week period. The youths threw Molotov cocktails and rocks at police and started fires in garbage bins. The disturbances were related to a dispute over a Malmo city official's decision not to renew the lease on a property that had been used for many years as an Islamic cultural center and that also housed a mosque. The Islamic Association claimed the decision was discriminatory. Seventeen persons were detained, one police officer was injured, and two persons were prosecuted; however, no convictions resulted.

In August 2008 a mosque in Strömsund in the north was set on fire. The incident took place on the opening day of the facility. No one was injured and the fire was extinguished.

In July 2008 a campaign against the building of a mosque in Karlskrona in the south was initiated by the neo-Nazi group "Friendship Karlskrona." The campaign was initiated after local officials voted in favor of allowing construction of the mosque. The officials' decision remained unchanged.

In May 2009 the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO), on behalf of a Muslim resident, sued a school in Vasteras for religious harassment and claimed \$12,500 (100,000 SEK) in damages for him. The man was attending a bus driver education course when his teacher stated that practicing Muslims should leave the country and equated terrorism and suicide-bombers with Islam. The teacher stopped working at the school, and the Muslim man was employed as a bus driver. The case was not concluded at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2009 a building supply store complied with the DO and paid a Muslim man \$3,750 (30,000 SEK) after denying the man practical training for employment. The man had attended an interview, and as he was leaving it was time for prayer, which he performed by the cash register. The man was refused a position; he claimed it was because of his religion.

In December 2008 a Muslim high school student was awarded \$11,250 (90,000 SEK) from her high school after she experienced discrimination when she performed her practical training at a hotel. First she was not allowed to work in areas where guests could see her, and then teachers at her school questioned her veil and asked her to point out where in the Qur'an it is prescribed.

In September 2008 the DO sued the gym "Friskis och Sveltis" in Malmo after two Muslim female employees were discriminated against and harassed by their supervisor. The supervisor repeatedly insulted the women's religion and, among other things, stated they would not receive permanent positions as long as they were wearing veils. The DO claimed damages of \$12,500 (100,000 SEK) for each woman. The case was not concluded at the end of the reporting period.

In August 2008 the DO sued a cleaning company and claimed damages of \$15,000 (120,000 SEK) after it fired a Muslim woman because of her clothing. The company claimed its employees had to wear pants, not a long skirt, which the woman did for religious reasons. The DO asserted the company's dress code was unjustified and stated the woman had been disadvantaged by the rules. The case was not concluded at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2008 the DO sued a sports center for denying a woman access to its aerobic facilities because she was wearing a head cloth and veil. The sports center asserted that she presented a health risk to herself. However, by the end of the reporting period the sport center allowed women with veils to access the facilities.

In February 2008 the Appeals Court upheld the verdict in the 2005 case against the city of Gothenburg concerning two Muslim women who were turned away at a municipal swimming pool due to their clothing. Plaintiffs appealed to the Supreme Court, which decided not to try the case, and the city of Gothenburg was compelled to pay \$ 2,500 (20,000 SEK) to each of the women.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The U.S. Embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders, and embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance.

SWITZERLAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, particularly against Islamic and Jewish minorities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 15,942 square miles and a population of 7.5 million.

Three-quarters of the population nominally belong to either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant churches, and although actual church attendance rates are much lower, 80 percent say they are religious. Of this group, 22 percent acknowledged being "very religious," according to a July-August 2007 Religion Monitor survey sponsored by the Bertelsmann Foundation.

The arrival of immigrants has contributed to the noticeable growth of religious communities that had little presence in the past. The 2000 census notes membership in religious denominations as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic; 35.3 percent Protestant; 4.3 percent Muslim; 1.8 percent Christian Orthodox; and 11.1 percent professed no formal creed. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent per group of the population include Old Catholics, other Christian groups, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews. Authorities had no indication of religious affiliation for 4.3 percent of residents.

The majority of Muslims originate from Bosnia, Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania, followed by Turkey as well as North African and other Arab countries. Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and Southeastern Europe typically settle in the German-speaking eastern and central regions, whereas those arriving from North African and other Arab countries commonly relocate to the French-speaking

western region. The majority are Sunni Muslims, while other groups include Shi'a and Alawites. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of Muslims are estimated to be practicing believers. The country has two large mosques, in Geneva and Zurich, and approximately 120 official prayer rooms. It is believed that another 100 prayer rooms exist, many of them belonging to Albanian, Turkish, or Arab communities.

Approximately 75 percent of Jewish households are located in Zurich, Geneva, Basel, and Bern.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Article 15 of the Constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience, and the Federal Penal Code prohibits any form of debasement of or discrimination against any religion or any religious adherents.

The law penalizes public incitement to racial hatred or discrimination, spreading racist ideology, and denying crimes against humanity, and there have been convictions under this legislation for anti-Semitism and historical revisionism, including Holocaust denial.

There is no official state church; religious matters are handled by the cantons (states) according to Article 72 of the Constitution. Most of the 26 cantons (with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel, where church and state are separate) financially support at least one of the three traditional religious communities-- Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, or Protestant--with funds collected through taxation. Each canton observes its own regulations regarding the relationship between church and state. In some cantons the church tax is voluntary, but in others an individual who chooses not to contribute to the church tax may have to formally leave the church. In some cantons private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons grant "church taxation" status to the Jewish community. Islamic and other nonofficial religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Ascension, Whit Sunday, Whit Monday, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day. Sunday is a public holiday; shops remain closed and Sunday work is generally not allowed.

A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

Groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize. Foreign missionaries must obtain a "religious worker" visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof that the foreigner would not displace a citizen from doing the job, has formally completed theological training, and would be supported financially by the host organization. The host organization must acknowledge the country's legal order and must not tolerate its abuse by members, either in theory or in practice. Between November 2006 and October 2007, a total of 63 ordained clergymen and 130 nonordained religious employees were working on short-term permits in the country.

On January 1, 2008, a new Federal Law on Foreigners entered into force, establishing mandatory training for immigrant clerics in order to facilitate their integration into society. Among other provisions, the training program is meant to ensure that immigrant clerics can speak at least one of the three main national languages.

Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but school authorities at the county level wield some discretionary power in its implementation. Religious education is taught in most public cantonal schools, with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel. Classes in Catholic and Protestant doctrines are normally offered; some schools also cover other religious groups in the country. In the Canton of Lucerne, since 2002 two municipalities have offered religious classes in Islamic doctrine. In some cantons, religious classes are voluntary, while in others they form part of the mandatory curriculum; however, waivers are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Those of different religious groups are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by religious groups, or they may teach their children at home.

A number of cantons have reformed religious education in public schools to either complement or entirely supplant traditional classes in Christian doctrines with nonconfessional teachings about religion and culture. In virtually all cantons

contemplating or implementing reform, authorities planned to make the nonconfessional teachings about religion and culture a nonelective part of the curriculum for all pupils.

Regarding waivers on religious grounds from classes other than confessional instruction, there are no national guidelines, and practices vary. Some cantons have issued guidelines not to excuse pupils from swimming or physical education classes. On October 24, 2008, the Federal Tribunal reviewed its 1993 ruling regarding exemptions for students from swimming or other physical education classes on religious grounds. The Tribunal's October ruling allows individual cantons to determine when exemptions from swimming lessons are permitted on religious grounds.

The Government's Federal Service for Combating Racism continued to support antiracism activities with money from the regular federal budget. In 2008 it supported 61 projects with a total of \$690,000 (790,000 Swiss Francs).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom. There were, however, some restrictions at the local level.

Immigration authorities requested immigrant clerics to respect the public order and refused to grant residency permits to imams considered "fundamentalists." Resident Islamic organizations have complained that authorities in many cantons and municipalities discriminated against them by refusing zoning approval to build mosques or Islamic cemeteries.

The 2005 Law on the Protection of Animals prevents local ritual slaughter for kosher and halal meat; however, importation of such meat remains legal and available.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In response to a growing number of soldiers of Muslim faith, the army held a meeting in May 2009 of all its chaplains to review the ways in which the army can support the spiritual needs of its Muslim personnel.

On April 20, 2009, the Jewish communities of Geneva and the Intercommunity Center for Coordination against Anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD) organized a major ceremony with over three thousand participants on Shoah Remembrance Day.

On February 16, 2009, the cantonal authorities of Ticino rejected a citizen's initiative to ban minarets in that canton.

In February 2009 the city of Thun changed its cemetery regulations to accord Muslim citizens dedicated parts of municipal cemeteries for their graves.

On September 9, 2008, Federal Councilor Pascal Couchepin, who was President of the Confederation in 2008, conveyed a public message of Ramadan greetings to the country's Muslims and attended an iftar at the House of Religions in Bern with members of the Muslim community.

On July 17, 2008, The Directorate of Public Works of the canton of Bern rejected a complaint filed by local residents against the construction of a Turkish-Islamic Center in Ostermundigen. The residents argued that the center would create too much neighborhood noise and would be open beyond the usual hours for commerce and services.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuse and discrimination, but whether these instances were based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, or ethnicity and culture, is difficult to determine. Some observers remained concerned about the social climate for religious minorities, particularly Jews and Muslims.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the number of reported incidents against foreigners or minorities was 92 in 2008, a decrease from 136 in 2007. These figures included instances of spoken and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults.

During 2008, CICAD recorded 96 anti-Semitic incidents in the western, French-speaking part of the country, ranging from spoken and written attacks to offensive graffiti and acts of vandalism against Jewish property. In 2007, CICAD noted 38 anti-Semitic incidents in the same part of the country. The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities assessed that this tendency towards increased incidents also was observed in the German-speaking region.

On the night of January 11, 2009, unknown persons destroyed the front window of a Jewish study center in Geneva. According to the Secretary General for CICAD, this was clearly an anti-Semitic act. Police were investigating the incident at the end of the reporting period.

In November and December 2008, an anti-Semitic pamphlet was sent to local Jewish organizations and individuals. CICAD filed complaints against the editor and publisher of the pamphlet in the same months.

On November 28, 2008, unknown persons broke into the Islamic Center in Näfels (Canton of Glarus) and vandalized the Qur'an and prayer rugs, stole some items, and carved a swastika on a cabinet door. Police were investigating the incident at the end of the reporting period.

On November 10, 2008, unknown perpetrators placed anti-Semitic posters on the windows of a grocery store in Basel that sells kosher products.

On November 2, 2008, during a soccer game between two junior teams in Zurich, one of which was from a Jewish soccer club, a player from the other team reportedly shouted anti-Semitic comments and made crude gestures. The referee ejected the offending player from the game. After the game, players and fans reportedly attacked and injured the coach of the Jewish team and insulted the Jewish players with more anti-Semitic statements.

On July 4, 2008, three young skinheads reportedly knocked at the door of a vacation home that was occupied by participants of a summer camp for Jewish youths in the Canton of Valais. One of the skinheads reportedly asked the summer camp participants whether they were Jews and then shouted threats.

At year's end, no additional information was available regarding the status of the police investigation into a November 12, 2007, incident in which a 23-year-old

Muslim man entered the Islamic center in Crissier near Lausanne and fired several shots, seriously injuring a 43-year-old worshiper.

The minaret building projects in Wangen (in the Canton of Solothurn), Langenthal (Canton of Bern), and Wil (Canton of Sankt Gallen) provoked fierce political debates beyond the communities concerned. Despite opposition, the minaret in Wangen was built and inaugurated on June 27, 2009. At the end of the reporting period, there were only four minarets in the country, at the Geneva, Zurich, Winterthur, and Wangen mosques. On March 4, 2009, (National Council) and June 5, 2009, (Council of States) both houses of Parliament overwhelmingly rejected an initiative, introduced by right-wing parties in late June 2008, seeking a ban on the construction of minarets. Proponents of the initiative contend that the construction of minarets symbolizes a religious and political claim to power that calls into question the Swiss legal system. Following the Federal Council's confirmation of the technical validity of the petition to force a national vote, the Council issued a public statement strongly criticizing the initiative as infringing on "guaranteed international rights" and contradicting "core values of the Swiss Federal Constitution." The Federal Council stated, "Such a ban would endanger peace between religions and would not help to prevent the spread of fundamentalist Islamic beliefs." In conclusion, the Federal Council recommended that the Parliament reject the initiative without making a counter proposal, which the Parliament did. According to the law, the initiative was scheduled to be submitted to a national public vote on November 29, 2009.

The Swiss Council of Religions (SCR), which is comprised of senior representatives from the Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholics, the Swiss Protestant Church, and the Muslim and Jewish communities, continued to hold biannual meetings with Interior Minister Pascal Couchepin to discuss religious policy.

Many nongovernmental organizations coordinated interfaith events to promote tolerance throughout the country.

From November 1 to 9, 2008, religious communities in approximately forty cities across the country joined together to celebrate a "Week of Religions" under the motto "Getting to Know Each Other." For a week, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is invited each other to attend their religious services and held a series of special events such as music concerts, panel discussions, round table meetings, and open discussion forums.

Jewish leaders reported that they organized an annual awareness-raising trip to Auschwitz, Poland, for teachers and students that had a positive multiplier effect in classrooms.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SYRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government imposes restrictions on this right. While there is no official state religion, the Constitution requires that the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation. The Constitution provides for freedom of faith and religious practice, provided that religious rites do not disturb the public order; however, the government restricts full freedom of choice on religious matters.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to prosecute persons aggressively for their alleged membership in the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafist movements and continued to outlaw the Jehovah's Witnesses. In addition, the Government continued to monitor the activities of all groups, including religious groups, and discouraged proselytizing, which it deemed a threat to relations among religious groups.

There were occasional reports of minor tensions among religious groups, some of which were attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with civil society, religious leaders, and adherents of almost all religious groups as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 71,498 square miles and a population of 20 million. Sunnis constitute 74 percent of the population and are present throughout the country. Other Muslim groups, including Alawites, Ismailis, and Shi'a, together constitute 13 percent. The Druze account for 3 percent of the population. Various Christian groups constitute the remaining 10 percent.

The minority Alawite sect holds an elevated political status disproportionate to its numbers because President Asad and his family are Alawites.

The majority of Christians adhere to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belong to the autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches (which recognize the

Roman Catholic Pope), or the independent Nestorian Church. There is also a Yezidi population of 30,000, and there are between 100 and 200 Jews. It is difficult to obtain precise population estimates for religious groups due to Government sensitivity to sectarian strife. The Government conducts a census every 10 years, the most recent of which was in 2004. The census did not include information on religious and ethnic demographics, and there is no evidence any census specifically asked people to identify their religious affiliation.

The largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church, known in the country as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Most citizens of Armenian descent belong to the Armenian (Apostolic) Church, which uses an Armenian liturgy. The largest Uniate church in the country is the Greek Catholic Church. Other Uniate groups include the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, which derives from the Nestorian Church. Protestant Christian denominations include Baptists and Mennonites. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is also present.

Most Christians live in urban centers in and around Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Lattakia, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast. The majority of Alawites live in the mountainous areas of the coastal Lattakia governorate. Many of the Druze live in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southern governorate of Suweida where the Druze constitute the vast majority of the local population. The few remaining Jews are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yezidis are found primarily in the northeast.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of faith and religious practice, provided that religious rites do not disturb the public order. Government policies and the judicial system allowed many groups to worship freely, although some restrictions were imposed. The Government bans Jehovah's Witnesses, and they must conduct their activities without attracting its attention. Citizens have the legal right to sue the Government when they believe it has violated their rights. During the reporting period, there were no known lawsuits against the Government over specifically religious issues.

The Government restricts full freedom of choice in religious matters. The Government does not recognize the religious status of Muslims who convert to

Christianity. The reverse is not true. In the event of a conversion to Christianity, the Government still regards the individual convert as Muslim and still subject to Shari'a (Islamic Law). A Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man, but a Christian woman can marry a Muslim man. If a Christian woman marries a Muslim man, however, she is not allowed to be buried in a cemetery for Muslims unless she converts to Islam. If a person wants to convert from Christianity to Islam, the law states that the presiding Muslim cleric must inform the prospective convert's diocese.

There is no official state religion; however, the Constitution requires that the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation. While there is no civil law prohibiting proselytizing, the Government discourages it and occasionally prosecutes missionaries for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups" when they engage in such activities. Most charges of this kind carry sentences of imprisonment from five years to life, although such sentences are often reduced to one or two years.

There were no reported cases of the Government prosecuting anyone for posing a threat to the relations among religious groups during the reporting period. Instead, there were several reports that the Government gave Shi'a favorable treatment and allowed Shi'a missionaries to construct mosques and convert Sunnis. Anecdotal reports claimed Shi'a missionaries, supposedly backed by Iranian interests, provided financial incentives to individuals converting from Sunni to Shi'a Islam. The Government does not consider this missionary activity as proselytizing because the country makes no legal distinction between Islamic sects.

The Government selects for religious leadership positions Muslims who have no intention of altering the secular nature of the Government. The Grand Mufti of Syria continued to call on Muslims to stand up to Islamic fundamentalism and urged leaders of the various religious groups to engage in regular dialogue for mutual understanding.

Membership in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is illegal, as is membership in any "Salafist" organization, a designation in local parlance denoting Saudi-inspired fundamentalism. The Government and the State Security Court have not defined the exact parameters of what constitutes a Salafist activity or explained why it is illegal. Affiliation with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is punishable by death, although in practice the sentence is typically commuted to 12 years in prison. Hamas is a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot, but the Government supports its political representation in the country as one of several Palestinian factions.

All religions and religious orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all religious and nonreligious group meetings, except for worship. The registration process can be complicated and lengthy, but the Government usually allows groups to operate informally while awaiting approval.

For issues of personal status, the Government requires its citizens to be affiliated nominally with Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Religious affiliation is documented on the birth certificate and is required on legal documentation when getting married or traveling for religious pilgrimage. Recognized religious groups, including all government-recognized Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, receive free utilities and are exempt from real estate taxes on religious buildings and personal property taxes on their official vehicles.

During the reporting period, the Government continued its support for the practice and study of government-sanctioned forms of Islam on radio and television. State radio continued to broadcast the dawn, noon, and afternoon Islamic prayers. State television also broadcast recitations from the Qur'an in the morning.

Members of religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws concerning marriage and divorce. The personal status law on divorce for Muslims is based on Shari'a, and some of its provisions are interpreted by government-appointed religious judges in a manner that discriminates against women.

The Civil Law for Catholics provides special provisions for Catholics involving inheritance rights, the jurisdiction of Christian courts, the legal marriage age, the legality of mixed marriages for Catholics, and adoption. As of the end of the reporting period, the Government had not passed legislation on personal status for Orthodox Christians. Orthodox Christians, therefore, remained subject to the personal status law for Muslims, except for marriage and divorce.

Under the country's interpretation of Shari'a, the legal standard for Muslim men to obtain a divorce is much lower than that for Muslim women. Husbands may claim adultery as grounds for divorce, while wives often face a higher legal standard when presenting the same case. A man can be found guilty of adultery only if the act takes place inside the home. If a wife requests a divorce from her husband, she may be denied alimony and the return of her dowry in some instances.

In the event of divorce, under Shari'a, a woman loses the right to custody of her sons when they reach the age of 13, and her daughters when they reach the age of 15, regardless of religion. Women can also lose custody before their children reach this age if they remarry, work outside the home, or move outside of the city or country. In such cases, the custody of the children reverts to the maternal grandmother until the ages of 13 and 15, respectively. After that, custody reverts to the father until the children reach maturity at age 18.

Inheritance is based on Shari'a for all citizens except Catholics. Accordingly, married women are usually granted half the share of inheritance that male heirs receive. When a Christian woman marries a Muslim, she is not entitled to an inheritance. In all communities, however, male heirs must provide financial support to unmarried female relatives who inherit less. For example, a brother would inherit his and his unmarried sister's share from their parents' estate, and he would be obligated to provide for the sister's well-being with that inheritance. If the brother failed to do so, she would have the right to sue.

Polygamy is legal for Muslim men, but few practice it. In addition, there is a caveat in the personal status law for Muslims stipulating that polygamy is illegal for Druze, who are otherwise covered by the Personal Status Law for Muslims.

The Government generally does not prohibit links between its citizens and coreligionists in other countries or between its citizens and the international hierarchies that govern some religious groups; however, it prohibits contact between the Jewish community and Jews in Israel.

Government policy disavows sectarianism of any kind; however, religion can be a factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawites hold dominant positions in the military and other security services disproportionate to their numbers. By contrast, because their religion is banned, Jehovah's Witnesses are discriminated against in employment.

The Government observes the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Orthodox and Western Easter, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, and Western Christmas as national holidays.

There is no specific law against the production and distribution of religious literature or other types of media. However, articles 298 and 462 of the Syrian Penal Code prohibit "causing tension between religious communities," provisions the Government uses to prosecute groups it deems harmful to society, mostly those

viewed as Salafists. There were many recent instances in which persons were prosecuted in the Supreme State Security Court for possessing books or compact disks containing what the Government terms "Salafist" teachings.

The Government permitted the use of religious language in public, including the placement of banners bearing religious slogans at prominent public landmarks during religious holidays.

The Government continued to promote Islamic banking. Several banks received preliminary approval or government licenses to set up and operate Islamic Banks in the country.

The Government allows foreign Christian faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to operate in the country under the auspices of the Catholic or Orthodox Churches. This permits the NGOs to operate without officially registering.

Religious minorities, with the exception of Jews, are represented among the senior officer corps. In keeping with the Government's secular policy, however, the military does not have a chaplain corps; members of the military do not have direct access to religious or spiritual support; and military personnel are expected to refrain from expressing their faith overtly during work hours. For example, Muslims are discouraged from praying while on duty.

Conscientious objection to military service is not permitted under the law. Historically, both Christian and Muslim religious leaders were exempted from military service. Legislation passed in 2008 stipulates that religious leaders must pay the Government a levy to be exempted from military service, but Christian religious leaders do not have to pay the levy.

All public schools are officially government-run and non-sectarian, although in practice some schools are operated by the Christian and Druze communities. There is mandatory religious instruction in public schools for all religious groups, with government-approved teachers and curriculums. Religious instruction is provided on Islam and Christianity only, and courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Groups that participate in Islamic courses include Sunni, Shi'a, Alawite, Ismaili, Yezidi, and Druze. Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the Government permitted the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean in some schools

on the premise that they are "liturgical languages." There is no mandatory religious study at the university level.

The Government does not require the designation of religion on a passport or national identity card. The Government requires religion to be listed on a civic register certificate that is required for marriage registration and traveling on the Islamic pilgrimage of Umra to Saudi Arabia.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policies and the judicial system allowed many groups to worship freely. However, the Government aggressively prosecuted persons for their alleged membership in the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafist movements. Human rights groups claimed that many of the accused were simply followers of a particular preacher or mosque. In addition, the Government required Jews to receive government permission to travel, applied extra scrutiny to their licenses, property and other government papers, and excluded them from employment in the civil service and armed forces.

All groups, religious and nonreligious, are subject to surveillance and monitoring by government security services. The Government particularly considers militant Islam a threat to the regime and closely monitors those individuals it considers to be religious militants. While the Government allows mosques to be built, it monitors and controls sermons and often closes mosques between prayers.

While The Government allows foreign Christian faith-based NGOs to operate in the country without officially registering, foreign Islamic faith-based NGOs must register and receive approval to operate from the Ministry of Religious Endowments. Security forces regularly question these charities on their sources of income and monitor their expenditures.

The Jewish community was prohibited from sending historical Torahs abroad under a law against exporting any of the country's historical and cultural treasures. This posed a serious problem for the dwindling Jewish community concerned about the preservation of its ancient religious texts.

The Government occasionally published or allowed the distribution of anti-Semitic material through radio and television programming, news articles, cartoons, and other mass media. Anti-Israel material was widespread, some of which carried anti-Semitic overtones. During the reporting period, state media outlets such as

Teshreen, *Al-Ba'th*, *Al-Thawra*, and the Syrian News website published anti-Semitic images alleging Jewish control of the United States and the world. The state-owned newspapers *Al-Thawra* and *Teshreen* published opinion pieces in April 2009 that employed particularly strong anti-Semitic language.

In October 2008, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor ruled religious leaders could no longer serve on the boards of Islamic charities. Traditionally, nearly all Islamic charities in the country were headed by clerics. The Government's decision followed close on the heels of a September 2008 terrorist attack against a military building in Damascus, allegedly by militants associated with Fatah al-Islam.

Also in October 2008, the Ministry of Religious Endowments instructed all Islamic religious institutes to cease accepting foreign students effective September 2009. Local contacts reported that any new foreign students who wished to study Islam in the country will have to attend a new educational institute administered by the Ministry of Religious Endowments. This decision, according to contacts, reflected the Government's fear that centers of Islamic instruction might have provided scholarships to individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

European diplomats and human rights organizations noted the Government increased repressive actions against Muslims alleged to have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamic organizations with political agendas during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, human rights organizations documented the arrests of dozens of persons for alleged ties to political Islamic groups. In all cases, the Government accused the detainees of belonging to groups that advocated violence. The Government rarely furnished documentation on the number of detained persons. Human rights groups reported on citizens who were arrested or detained for alleged ties to such groups in previous years but whose detention was only recently made public.

According to human rights contacts, on June 29, 2009, Government security services arrested Islamic scholar and Imam Salah al-Din Kuftaro, the son of the late Grand Mufti Ahmad Kuftaro and brother of Imam Mahmud Kuftaro. He was transferred to the custody of the First Magistrate on charges of embezzlement,

working without a license, and having relations with foreign entities without prior approval. At the end of the reporting period, he was in Adra prison awaiting trial.

Security services detained a Chinese Uighur imam and his family in Damascus for approximately three weeks during the reporting period before releasing them. The Government did not state the reasons for the detention. His reported study at a local Islamic institute may have prompted Government scrutiny. NGOs maintained the imam had previously been imprisoned in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region on charges of "illegal religious activities." The Government also attempted to prevent another Chinese Uighur Muslim family from leaving the country. Both families eventually departed Syria in July.

In mid-May 2009, the Government closed the Center for Islamic Studies for four weeks and detained Islamic scholar and Imam Mahmud Kufaro, brother of Salah al-Din Kufaro, for 10 days. The Government did not provide a reason for the closure or the detention. Contacts believed, however, that the closure and detention were related the Government's attempts, through the offices of the Grand Mufti and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, to exert more control over Islamic institutions since the September 2008 terrorist attack attributed to Fatah al-Islam.

In July 2008, Muslims, whom the Government alleged to be terrorists held at Sednaya prison, began a series of riots that continued into late December. Though dependable statistics were not available, many human rights activists and diplomats believe that more than 50 prisoners thought to have ties to Al Qaida were killed in the fighting. Witnesses in the area of the prison reported hearing the sound of gunfire coming from the prison on multiple occasions.

The Supreme State Security Court sentenced dozens of Muslims during the reporting period to lengthy prison sentences for membership in the Muslim Brotherhood. Human rights groups and diplomats from European embassies estimated there were thousands of alleged Islamic terrorists detained in prisons, security service detention centers, or other secret detention facilities.

The Government continued to hold an unknown number of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other individuals associated with illegal political Islamic groups as political detainees and prisoners. Many prisoners not connected to the Muslim Brotherhood were charged and convicted for "membership in a Salafist organization." Arrests, and in some cases convictions, of citizens alleged to belong

to illegal political Islamic groups were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Muslims as potential threats to regime stability.

Human rights organizations reported that detainees and prisoners who were alleged to be members of illegal political Islamic groups were subjected to torture and other forms of mistreatment while in custody.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On June 1-2, 2009, the British Embassy and the Ministry of Religious Endowments co-sponsored a conference entitled "The Message of Peace in Islam." Speakers included government ministers, academics, and senior Muslim and Christian religious leaders.

On May 3-5, 2009, the Al-Fatah Islamic Institute, in cooperation with the University of Alberta and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, sponsored "Islam and the West," a conference focused on interfaith dialogue.

The Al-Andalus Institute for Islamic Studies in Hama hosted an interfaith conference entitled "Religion and Respect: Learning from Each Other's Faith" on April 3-4, 2009, in Hama.

On January 21-23, 2009, the Canadian Embassy and local Syrian activists organized a three-day workshop on the role of women in promoting interfaith dialogue. The workshop featured three Canadian and two American women as facilitators. Three of the presenters were Jewish; they were joined by American Rabbi Marc Gopin via recorded message. Local Christian and Muslim clergy participated in opening the workshop.

The "Sham Spiritual Oasis" architecture exhibition opened to the public in Damascus September 7-21, 2008 at the Gallery Mustafa Ali and during November 15-30, 2008 in the visitor center of the Wadi Deir Mar Musa near Nebek. The exhibition featured proposals by international architects for an eco cultural way station that would provide a multifunctional space for persons of different ethnic

and religious backgrounds to join one another for meditation and educational cooperation. The Government announced the winning design would be built at Deir Mar Musa on 14 hectares of land donated by the Government for that purpose. Wadi Deir Mar Musa and the European Union sponsored the competition.

During the reporting period, the Grand Mufti made public statements welcoming tolerance toward different sects of Islam and toward Christians and Jews.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious groups, mainly attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

Social conventions and religious proscriptions made conversion relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversion, which is technically illegal. In many cases, societal pressure forced such converts to relocate within the country or leave the country to practice their new religion openly. According to reports, in September 2008, the United Kingdom granted asylum to a couple who had converted from Islam to evangelical Christianity. The couple, who had reportedly discussed their conversions with Muslims on Internet chat sites, consequently received threats and decided to leave Syria for their personal safety.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government has limited contact with the Syrian government; however, the Charge d'Affaires and other embassy officials met with religious leaders and adherents of almost all religious groups at the national, regional, and local levels to convey to the public U.S. support for freedom of religion.

During the reporting period, the embassy identified five local citizens to participate in exchange visits to the United States focusing on interfaith dialogue through the State Department's International Visitor exchange program.

TAIWAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Taiwan authorities generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by Taiwan authorities during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) discusses religious freedom with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Taiwan has an area of 13,800 square miles and a population of 23 million. According to the 2006 Government Information Office Yearbook, the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) estimated that 35 percent of the population considers itself Buddhist and 33 percent Taoist. While the overwhelming majority of religious adherents are categorized as either Buddhist or Taoist, many adherents consider themselves to be both Buddhist and Taoist.

In addition to organized religions, many persons also believe in traditional Chinese folk religions, which include some aspects of shamanism, ancestor worship, and animism. Researchers and academics estimate that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion. Such folk religions may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions.

Traditional Chinese religions with adherents constituting less than 5 percent of the population include: I Kuan Tao, Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion), Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion), Li-ism, Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion), Tian Li Chiao (Tenrikyo), Universe Maitreya Emperor Religion, Hai Tze Tao, Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion), Da Yi Chiao (Great Changes Religion), Pre-cosmic Salvationism, and Huang Chung Chiao (Yellow Middle Religion).

There also may be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions and Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong is registered as a civic, rather than a religious, organization. According to an academic source, Falun Gong membership exceeds 600,000 and continues to grow.

Small percentages of the population consider themselves Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Sunni Muslim. The Church of Scientology, Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mahikari Religion, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Unification Church are registered. Other Christian denominations present include Presbyterians, the True Jesus Church, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, and Episcopalians. The majority of the indigenous population of 496,086 Aborigines is Protestant or Catholic. There are also a small number of adherents of Judaism, although they are predominately expatriates.

While the authorities do not collect or independently verify statistics on religious affiliation, they maintain registration statistics reported voluntarily by religious organizations. The MOI Religious Affairs Section believes that these statistics significantly understate the number of religious believers. The MOI Religious Affairs Section estimates that approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participates in some form of organized religious practice, as distinguished from activities connected with traditional Chinese folk religions.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographical lines. Members of the political leadership practice a variety of faiths.

Section II. Status of Official Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The authorities at all levels sought to protect this right in full, and did not tolerate its abuse, either by official authorities or private actors. There is no official religion.

Although registration is voluntary, 27 religious organizations have registered with the MOI's Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship

may register with local authorities, many choose not to do so and operate as the personal property of their leaders. Registered religious organizations operate on a tax-free basis and are required to submit annual reports on their financial operations. The only ramification for nonregistration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for registered religious organizations. There were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new religious groups during the reporting period.

Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but compulsory religious instruction is not permitted in any public or private elementary, middle, or high school accredited by the Ministry of Education (MOE). High schools accredited by the MOE, while not allowed to require religious instruction, may provide elective courses in religious studies, provided such courses do not promote certain religious beliefs over others.

Universities and research institutions may have religious studies departments. There are many private theological institutes. The MOE has accredited the Dharma Drum Mountain Community University established by the late Buddhist Master Sheng Yen, the School of Theology, Chang Jung Christian University, College of Buddhism, Huafan University, College of Buddhist Studies, and Fo Guang University. According to the MOE, there were ten additional university-level religion departments or theological institutes under review for accreditation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Taiwan authorities generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Taiwan authorities during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2008, the MOI made it easier for religious groups to obtain subsidies for social welfare projects and activities to promote religious tolerance by simplifying the application process. On October 13, 2008, the MOI held its annual ceremony to honor more than 200 religious groups, which included Catholic, Protestant, and Buddhist groups, for their contributions to public service, social welfare, and social harmony.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. For example, the Taiwan Council for Religion and Peace, the China Religious Believers Association, and the Taiwan Religious Association are private organizations that promote greater understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions. These associations and various other religious groups sponsor symposiums to promote mutual understanding.

The interfaith Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace sponsors summer seminars every year to help college students understand the practices of major religions. The 2008 seminar was entitled, "Open up a New World for Volunteer Workers," and it was hosted by the I Kuan Tao and was held in Puli Township in Nantou County from September 5 to 8. A total of 450 students and religious workers, representing 13 religious groups, participated in the seminar.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The AIT discusses religious freedom with the Taiwan authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

TAJIKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, but legislation and governmental decrees contradict this right. The Government continued to promote secularism and allowed religious practice only under tight controls.

Respect for religious freedom continued to decline during the reporting period. The Government expanded its efforts to control virtually all aspects of religious life, and government officials actively monitored religious groups, institutions, and figures. Government policies reflected concern about Islamic extremism, and government officials used this concern to justify imposing restrictions and engaging in surveillance. The Government passed a new religion law that includes significant restrictions on religious expression, particularly among the country's majority Muslim population. The Government continued to use the registration process to hinder, influence, or intimidate religious organizations and communities. Furthermore, the Government continued to enforce official and unofficial dress codes that hindered religious expression, including an unevenly enforced ban on girls wearing the hijab, a Muslim head covering, at public schools and universities.

Government restrictions disproportionately affected Muslims, although the Government targeted any religious organization it deemed to have "foreign influences." Some government officials expressed opinions in the press that minority religious groups undermine national unity. Citizens and residents of the country, however, are generally tolerant of, and open to, religious diversity.

The Government tried to limit the U.S. Government's access to government officials and public institutions. Nevertheless, the U.S. Embassy discussed religious freedom concerns with the Government and used public diplomacy activities to engage a wide spectrum of society on religious freedom and tolerance, stressing the importance of sound public policy on religious issues. Embassy staff, including the Ambassador and visiting U.S. government officials, met regularly with community leaders of different faiths. Embassy staff investigated instances of potential discrimination and advocated strongly for government tolerance of all religious groups. The U.S. Embassy also supported exchange programs for local religious leaders to visit the United States.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 55,300 square miles and a population of more than seven million. According to local academic experts, the percentage of citizens who are Muslim is 97 percent. The President claimed the number is 99 percent; however, the degree of religious observance varies widely. Overall, active observance of Islam appears to be increasing steadily, especially among city residents and those under the age of 20. The majority of Muslim inhabitants adhere to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. Approximately 4 percent of Muslims are Ismaili, the majority of whom reside in the remote eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, some districts in Khatlon Region, and in Dushanbe, the capital. The country has approximately 2,980 registered mosques for daily prayers and 259 Friday prayer mosques (larger facilities built for weekly Friday prayers). Neither of these figures includes Ismaili places of worship (Jamoatkhonas).

There are 83 non-Muslim groups registered with the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA), which is part of the Ministry of Culture. The Government banned two locally operating Christian groups--the "Hayoti Farovon" (Abundant Life) and the Jehovah's Witnesses--in December 2008 and January 2009, respectively. Approximately 150,000 Christians, mostly ethnic Russians and other Soviet-era immigrants, reside in the country. The largest Christian group is Russian Orthodox; other registered organizations include Baptists, Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, and Korean Protestants. Other religious minorities include Baha'is, Zoroastrians, and Jews. Each of these groups is very small, and nearly all their members live in Dushanbe or other large cities. Some religious communities have been banned or denied registration, including the Jehovah's Witnesses. An estimated 0.01 percent of the population is atheist or does not belong to any religious denomination.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government enacted laws and issued decrees that directly contradict this right. There is no official state religion, but the Government recognizes the "special status" of Hanafi Islam, the Sunni sect with which most citizens identify. President Rahmon declared 2009 to be the "Year of Imam Azam," in honor of Abu Hanifa, the founder of the sect, and the Government sponsored events that promoted his philosophy and accomplishments. The Government recognizes only two religious holidays as state holidays--the Islamic holy days of Idi Ramazon (Eid al-Fitr) and Idi Qurbon (Eid al-Adha).

In 2009 the Government passed a new religion law that codified some restrictions that had been informally implemented in the past and introduced a framework for further restrictions. The Government also continued to enforce other laws and decrees that also infringe on religious expression.

The 2009 religion law, the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations," replaced a prior law that established a framework for government controls. The new law expands the Government's power to regulate religious communities. The Government claimed civil society had taken part in discussions about the law before it was passed, but there were only a few instances where the concerns of religious groups, political parties, or international experts were taken into account. In one case, for example, a provision was dropped that would have outlawed religious-based political parties – effectively eliminating the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). In another case, the Government changed the draft to allow for more mosques throughout the country, although it subordinated smaller mosques to central Friday mosques in an effort, critics say, to keep better tabs on the mosques' activities. Parliament passed the legislation with little debate and over the objections of opposition politicians.

The law defines the type of religious organizations that can exist in the country. As under the prior law, religious organizations and institutions must be registered by the DRA. Under the law, religious organizations must provide a large number of documents to comply with registration requirements, and registration can be denied for numerous technical reasons, including provision of incomplete information. The law singles out mosques for specific regulations, including population quotas. Friday prayer mosques can function in districts with 10,000-20,000 persons; five-time prayer mosques can function in areas with populations of 100-1000 (the quotas are higher for Dushanbe). The law stipulates that imams and imam-khatibs of mosques are selected by "the appropriate state bodies in charge of religious affairs." The law also gives the Government broad authority to regulate religious education. Any institution or organization that wishes to provide religious instruction must first obtain permission from the authorities.

Authorities had been unofficially implementing some of these provisions prior to the law's passage; some of the provisions were not being enforced uniformly throughout the country. It was unclear how or whether authorities would implement the most controversial provisions of the law, such as the population quotas for mosques and the selection of imams by government officials.

The Law on Observing National Traditions and Rituals regulates private celebrations and funeral services. The stated intent of the law is to protect the public from spending excessive amounts of money on celebrations, but the effect of the law is to limit private celebrations which have religious significance, such as weddings, funerals, and Mavludi Payghambar (the birthday of the Prophet). The law limits the number of guests, eliminates engagement parties, and controls ceremonial gift presentations and other rituals. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations reiterates these principles, mandating that "mass worship, religious traditions, and ceremonies are carried out according to the procedure of holding meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and peaceful processions prescribed by law of the Republic of Tajikistan."

The DRA is the primary administrative authority that oversees implementation of the Government's religious policy. The Ministry of Education oversees implementation of provisions related to religious instruction. In 2008 the Government established a Center for Islamic Studies within President Rahmon's executive office to help formulate the Government's religious policy, but the exact nature of this institution remained unclear. The head of the center is neither a scholar nor a religious figure. Law enforcement institutions, including the State Committee for National Security, monitor religious communities.

To register with the DRA, a religious group must submit a charter, a list of at least 10 members, and evidence of local government approval of the location of a house of worship, if one exists. A religious group is not required to have a physical structure in order to register, but it cannot hold regular meetings without one. In the absence of registration, local authorities can force a place of worship to close and fine its members.

The Government bans groups it considers "extremist" or it believes will "threaten social harmony," and it targeted Islamic organizations in particular. The ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) remained in effect, although the authorities arrested fewer suspected members than in the past. HT is an extremist Islamist political organization motivated by a socioreligious ideology that is virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western and calls for the overthrow of secular governments. In 2009 the Government banned the Salafiya movement, a group that reportedly has ties to Saudi Arabia. The Government has also targeted Christian organizations. The Jehovah's Witnesses remained banned, as did two local evangelical groups.

The Government sought to control the Islamic clergy through the Council of Ulamo, a group of scholars and imams that provides interpretations of religious

practice. Government officials refer to the Council as independent, but it is widely understood that the Government heavily influences--if not directly controls--the Council. Decisions and fatwas of the Council are perceived to be expressions of government policies; members of the Council are perceived to be loyal to the Government. Members of the Council draft and approve sermons for distribution to imams throughout the country, expecting them to read the sermons at Friday prayers.

The Government tightly controls religious instruction. In early 2008 the non-governmental Islamic University was brought under the control of the Ministry of Education. As a result of this change, the rector and all programs of study at the "Islamic Institute," as it is now called, must receive approval from the Ministry of Education. Teachers are subject to a vetting process. There are 19 madrassahs for students who have completed secondary school. According to the new Law on Freedom of Conscience, such private religious schools must register with the Ministry of Justice and obtain a license from the Ministry of Education. The Government inspects the curricula at private madrassahs and monitors classes by periodically placing an official in classrooms as an observer. In May 2009 a private madrassah in Dushanbe held its opening ceremony. It had been registered by the Ministry of Justice, but its license application was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Under the Law on Freedom of Conscience, it is legal for parents to teach religious beliefs to their own children in the privacy of their home, provided the child expresses a desire to learn. Religious homeschooling outside the immediate family is forbidden. Authorities in the southern region of Tajikistan have directed Muslim leaders to prohibit school-age boys from attending prayers at local mosques. Many have complied for fear the mosque would be shut down if they did not.

The Government issued a textbook to high schools in 2005 on the history of Islam, and a course on the history of religions is taught in public schools at the 10th grade level. Observers interpreted such government-imposed instruction as a way of controlling religious indoctrination. The Law on Freedom of Conscience authorizes religious associations to found religious educational institutions; mosques may "teach the basics of religion by setting up groups according to their regulations."

A 1999 constitutional amendment permits religiously based political parties, although a 1998 law remained in effect specifying that parties may not receive support from religious institutions. During the reporting period, two

representatives from the IRPT were members of the lower house of the national Parliament, which has 63 members. There also were 13 deputies from the IRPT in district and regional parliaments.

Government-owned publishing houses generally do not publish religious literature but have done so on occasion, including copies of the Qur'an. There is no legal restriction on the distribution or possession of the Qur'an, the Bible, or other religious works; however, in practice the Government restricted distribution of Christian and Islamic literature. The IRPT distributes one weekly newspaper and one monthly magazine. An executive decree generally prohibits publishing houses from publishing anything in Arabic script; however, some have been able to do so in special cases if the material was presented for review prior to printing. The Government considered this "ban" to be an attempt to prevent the publication of extremist literature. The Government continued to examine audio and video cassettes for extremist and antigovernment material.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The laws regulating religious expression are broad and often contradictory, and government institutions exert an undue degree of interference in the affairs of religious communities. The Government uses the registration process to regulate and monitor the activities of religious groups.

Law enforcement officials, including members of the State Committee on National Security, monitored operations of mosques throughout the country. Officials attended services to listen to messages imams delivered and to observe attendees.

The Government added the "Salafiya Organization" to its list of banned organizations in January 2009. A Salafi school near Dushanbe was closed in January. The Government cited "national unity and stability" as its reason for these actions. To counter this stance against Salafi practice, many Salafis, who refer to themselves simply as "*Ahli jamoat va sunnat*" (representatives of communities and Sunna), continued to attend mosques and simply adjusted their style of prayer to match that of Hanafi worshippers.

The Government previously organized "attestations" of imams, quizzing them on their knowledge of Islamic principles. In August 2007 four imams from daily prayer mosques in Dushanbe failed a test and were removed from their positions. Although no further tests have been administered, the Government organizes

seminars for Imam-Khatibs of Friday mosques in Dushanbe to teach them about the various sects of Islam.

Government officials continued to enforce dress and personal conduct codes that infringed on religious expression. A Ministry of Education decree banning women and girls from wearing the hijab in educational institutions remained in effect. The ban was unevenly enforced and affected regions of the country in which the Government's influence was strongest. For example, in the major cities of Dushanbe and Khujand, several female students and teachers were expelled or forced out of schools and universities for defying the ban, but in outlying areas there were no reports of expulsions as a result of students wearing the hijab. The Minister of Education told the founders of a private madrassah in Dushanbe they would not obtain a license if they allowed women or girls to wear the hijab. In some instances, government officials told observant Muslim men they would have to shave their beards if they wanted to work in bazaars, obtain passports, or work in government offices. Some government officials stressed the need for people to wear traditional Tajik robes and headwear--as opposed to explicitly religious dress such as hijab--while in public.

The DRA continued to control participation in the Hajj and impose restrictions on pilgrims, citing the need to maintain hygiene and safety standards. The DRA collects applications and all fees and makes all flight and hotel arrangements. The DRA chooses participants based on a set of factors, although most who apply are allowed to go. The Government announced in early 2009 that it would reduce the number of citizens allowed to go on the Hajj from 5,200 to 4,800.

A 2004 Council of Ulamo fatwa prohibiting women from praying in mosques remained in effect. The fatwa was generally observed; however, two mosques unofficially allowed women to pray and did not suffer consequences. There were reports that government officials asked imams to remove children from mosques during prayer times that conflicted with regular school hours and to instruct them that they should be attending school rather than praying. Restrictions on children attending services may indicate the Government's worry that the youthful population could become radicalized.

During the reporting period the Government reclaimed the property of the Grace Sunmin Church in Dushanbe with little compensation, stating that the Church's purchase of the land in the late 1990s was illegal. The Church itself was not banned but must find alternate facilities. The Government also closed several mosques in 2008 because they were not licensed, although such activity appeared

to have abated in 2009 in anticipation of the February 2010 parliamentary elections. The Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in January 2009. There were reports in Khujand of government officials entering homes during Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible discussion groups and arrests of group members in June 2009.

The Government tightly controls importation of religious literature. Religious organizations are required to submit copies of all literature to the Ministry of Culture for approval one month prior to delivery. Under the Law on Freedom of Conscience, religious associations may import "a proper number" of religious materials; the term "proper number" is not defined. In the past, officials have not permitted large shipments of books by Christian organizations, including the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Government has registered two religious newspapers. *Asolat*, an independent religious newspaper, was founded in March 2008 and has been published regularly since September 2008. A second religious newspaper, *Risolat*, was registered in August 2008.

Missionaries of registered religious groups are not restricted by law; however, those who openly proselytized encountered difficulties

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The number of people the Government detained for extremist activities was unknown. Reports stated that fewer suspected HT members were arrested in 2008 than in previous years; however, many speculated that government officials used the HT or extremist labels to harass opponents, extort favors or financial benefits, or otherwise intimidate rural populations.

In April and May 2009 hundreds of members of the Jamaat Tabligh Islamic missionary organization were arrested. The Jamaat Tabligh, originally banned by the Government in May 2006, is an Islamic missionary organization whose members traveled through Dushanbe and the south of the country to discuss Islam with other citizens. Although the group made no incendiary or violent statements, their increased presence and headquarters location in Pakistan caused the Government to view the organization as a potential extremist group or threat to government stability. Although most were released, several members remained in custody in June 2009.

In June 2009 local police and security service officials raided a mosque in the Zerafshan neighborhood of Dushanbe during the evening prayer and detained approximately 40 suspected Salafis. At the end of the reporting period, most detainees had been released. A few remained in custody, including Mullo Sirojiddin, one of the leaders of the Salafi movement in the country.

During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses remained banned, as did two local evangelical groups. A handful of foreign NGO workers were deported for allegedly conducting Christian missionary work. The operations of ORA International, a non-denominational Christian relief organization, were suspended because of government suspicions that the group was proselytizing. ORA's U.S. citizen director was deported. Government officials accused some citizens of betraying Islam by converting to Christianity. In Dushanbe, police detained Jehovah's Witnesses, and during interrogations government officials harassed and threatened them.

The Government continued to harass one of the country's most well-known imams, Eshoni Nuriddin, the imam-khatib of the Madrasai Muhammadi mosque in Vahdat District. In late 2008 officials from the State Committee on National Security allegedly detained him because of comments he made during his sermons at Friday prayers. Some of the objectionable subjects included criticism of government bans of the hijab and criticism of U.S. foreign policy.

The Dushanbe city government continued to harass the Grace Sun Min Mission Center over property rights. The Mission Center lawfully obtained rights to use property in Dushanbe in the late 1990s and has spent years renovating the buildings on the property to use as a house of worship and a school. City authorities had attempted to take the property back for several years, but courts repeatedly upheld the Mission Center's rights to the property. In 2008, however, Dushanbe's economic courts reversed their prior decisions; observers of the proceedings noted numerous substantive and procedural irregularities. The courts ordered the Mission Center to vacate the property and awarded the Mission Center only minimal compensation.

In late June 2008 officials tore down the only synagogue in the country to clear space for the grounds of a new presidential palace. A local court upheld an April 2008 eviction order against Dushanbe's Jewish community, despite irregularities in the manner in which authorities stripped the community of its property rights. In May 2009 the largest shareholder in one of the country's most prominent banks

donated a house in central Dushanbe to the Community to use as a place of worship.

Authorities reportedly informed representatives of Noni Hayat (Bread of Life), a Protestant church located near the synagogue in Dushanbe, that they should vacate their building by early July 2008 since it also was scheduled for demolition.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to relax the limits on printing in Arabic script by government publishing houses. The Government permitted the printing of materials presented to the director of the publishing house, if submitted for review prior to printing and deemed nonthreatening.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Conflict between different religious groups was rare, and there did not appear to be a widespread animus of one religious group against another. Some Muslim leaders, however, occasionally expressed the opinion that minority religious groups undermined national unity and complained that laws and regulations give preference to religious minorities. The Government's restrictive religious policy is applied to all religious groups, although many believe it affects Muslims to a greater extent because they constitute the majority of the population.

Women have seen social and educational gains made in the 20th century erode in recent years, in part because of deteriorating economic conditions. Increasing religious conservatism has contributed to this trend, and government policies have not been successful in stopping or reversing it.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy monitored ongoing religious freedom problems and issues that could potentially become abuses of religious freedom, including religious legislation, registration problems, court cases that might have been motivated by religious intolerance, and the destruction of houses of worship. The Embassy advocated on behalf of religious organizations when the Government exerted restrictions that infringed on their members' religious freedoms.

Embassy officers regularly met with leaders from all religious groups, the Government, and international organizations to discuss religious freedom concerns and to underscore the U.S. Government's commitment to religious freedom. The Embassy supported programs to create a better understanding of how democracies address secularism and religious freedom.

The Ambassador hosted an iftar in September 2008 for imams and religious activists. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers regularly spoke with students and held roundtables on human rights and religious freedom. In 2008 and 2009 Embassy officers discussed the *2008 International Religious Freedom Report* with journalists, religious leaders, and political figures in Dushanbe, Sughd, and Khatlon.

In late 2008 the Embassy sent a scholar on religious history from the Tajik Academy of Sciences to conduct research and teach in the United States for two months under the Direct Access to the Muslim World Program. In mid-2009 the Embassy sent five imams to learn about religious life in the United States under the International Visitor Leadership Program.

The U.S. Department of State continued to support youth summer camps managed by American Councils at various locations in the country. The mission of the camps is to reach out to Muslim youth ages 8-14 who are at risk of becoming targets of a terrorist organization's recruiting efforts and exposing them to positive messages about the United States.

TANZANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 364,900 square miles and a population of 40 million, of which 38.8 million live on the mainland and 1.2 million on the Zanzibar archipelago, which has a president and semiautonomous political structure separate from the mainland political system. The Government does not gather religious identification data in its census as a matter of policy. However, recent information suggests that 62 percent of the population is Christian, 35 percent is Muslim, and 3 percent are members of other religious groups.

On the mainland, Muslim communities are concentrated in coastal areas, with some large Muslim minorities also in inland urban areas. Between 80 and 90 percent of the Muslim population is Sunni; the remainder consists of several Shi'a subgroups, mostly of Asian descent. The Christian population is mostly composed of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other active religious groups include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and Baha'is. Zanzibar is 98 percent Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Hajj, and Christmas.

Customary and statutory laws govern Christians in both criminal and civil cases. Muslims are governed by customary and statutory law in criminal cases; however, Muslims in Zanzibar have a parallel system of kadhi courts to judge matters of divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other matters covered in customary Islamic law. The Kadhi, who is the senior Islamic scholar responsible for interpreting the Qur'an, is approved by the President and recognized as a judge. There is also a Kadhi Court of Appeal.

In March 2009 the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA) renewed its call for the establishment of a mainland kadhi court, an issue that has engendered heated debates among Muslim leaders, Catholic bishops, and other Christian groups in the past. This debate was revived during the 2008 parliamentary budget session when the Minister for Justice noted the Government was studying a report on the issue.

Zanzibar's court system generally parallels the mainland's legal system, and all cases tried in Zanzibar courts, except those involving constitutional issues and Islamic law, can be appealed to the Court of Appeals of the Union on the mainland. Decisions of Zanzibar's kadhi courts can be appealed to a special court comprised of the Zanzibar Chief Justice and five other sheikhs.

Religious organizations must register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Home Affairs on the mainland and with the Chief Government Registrar on Zanzibar. Religious organizations must have at least 10 followers to register, provide a written constitution, resumes of their leaders, and a letter of recommendation from their district commissioner. In addition, groups registering on Zanzibar must provide a letter of approval from the Mufti.

On the mainland, BAKWATA elects a Mufti, the community's religious leader. On Zanzibar the Mufti is appointed by the President of Zanzibar under the 2001 Mufti Law and serves both as a leader of the religious community and a public servant assisting with local governmental affairs.

The Zanzibar Mufti possesses the authority to settle all religious disputes involving Muslims, approve all Islamic activities and gatherings on Zanzibar, supervise all Zanzibari mosques, approve religious lectures by foreign clergy, and approve the importation of Islamic literature from outside Zanzibar. Under the 2001 Mufti Law, Zanzibar's mufti is able to recommend that the Chief Government Registrar approve or deny the registration of any Islamic organization.

Public schools may teach religion, but it is not part of the national curriculum. Parents or volunteers teach religion on an ad hoc basis. School administration and/or parent and teacher associations must approve the classes. Many private schools and universities are associated with religious institutions. There is an Islamic university in Morogoro, a Catholic university in Mwanza, numerous Islamic and Christian primary and secondary schools throughout the country, and a Baha'i secondary school in Iringa.

Religious organizations are banned from involvement in politics, and politicians are restricted from using language intended to incite one religious group against another or to encourage religious groups to vote for certain political parties. The law imposes fines and jail time on political representatives who campaign in houses of worship or educational facilities.

The law prohibits preaching or distributing material considered as inflammatory or that represents a threat to public order.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or records of vital statistics; however, it requires stating religion in police reports in cases where individuals may be asked to give sworn testimony. The Government also requires children to indicate a religion on school registration forms, so that children can be assigned to the appropriate religion class if the school offers religious instruction, and on applications for medical care, so that any specific religious custom may be observed.

Government policy forbids discrimination against persons based on religious belief or practice; however, some officials and businesspersons were believed to favor conducting business with coreligionists.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 18, 2009, police in Dodoma stopped two Christian evangelists from reading excerpts of the Qur'an during an open-air ceremony. The police temporarily detained both ministers and temporarily confiscated video recording equipment. The police released the ministers with a warning not to read the Qur'an during their sermons lest it antagonize the Muslim community and disrupt public order.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States. Although some women traditionally take the religion of their husbands after marriage, this practice continued to decline.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Some tensions between Muslims and Christians persisted.

According to the March 15, 2009, edition of *Msemakweli*, BAKWATA sent a team to Iringa to investigate reports of persons who had forced Muslims working in a local tea manufacturing plant to eat pork and drink alcohol. The Government investigated the incident; a final report was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Members of a Pentecostal church in Zanzibar reported social tensions with Muslim neighbors arising from the church's outdoor services.

On March 14, 2009, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu leaders issued a joint statement supporting government efforts against the killings of persons with albinism for their body parts, promising to work together and with the Government to end the practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

THAILAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, it restricted the activities of some groups. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government does not register new religious groups that have not been accepted into one of the existing religious governing bodies on doctrinal or other grounds. In practice, however, unregistered religious organizations operated freely, and the Government's practice of not recognizing new religious groups did not restrict their activities. The Government officially limits the number of foreign missionaries allowed to work in the country, although unregistered missionaries were present in large numbers and allowed to work freely, and the numerical quotas have increased in recent years.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. In the southernmost border provinces, continued separatist violence contributed to tense relations between ethnic Thai Buddhist and ethnic Malay Muslim communities. While the conflict in the south primarily involves ethnicity and nationalism, the close affiliation between ethnic and religious identity has caused it to take on religious overtones. As a result, there were a number of cases in which the violence in the region undermined citizens' abilities to undertake the full range of their religious activities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 198,000 square miles and a population of 64 million. According to the 2000 census, approximately 94 percent of the population is Buddhist and 5 percent is Muslim. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academics, and religious groups claim 85 to 95 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist and between 5 to 15 percent is Muslim. There are also small animist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, and Taoist populations. According to the Religious Affairs Department (RAD), persons who do not profess a religious faith make up less than one percent of the population.

Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion, although it is not an exclusive belief system, and most Thai Buddhists also incorporate Brahmin-Hindu and animist practices. The Buddhist clergy (Sangha) consists of two main schools: Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika. The former is older and more prevalent within the monastic community than the latter, which grew out of a 19th-century reform movement led by King Mongkut (Rama IV). The same ecclesiastical hierarchy governs both groups.

Islam is the dominant religion in four of the five southernmost provinces, which border Malaysia. The majority of Muslims are ethnic Malay, but the Muslim population also includes descendants of immigrants from South Asia, China, Cambodia, and Indonesia. The RAD reported that there are 3,644 registered mosques in 67 provinces, of which 3,088 are located in the 14 southern provinces. Of those, 2,331 are located in the five southernmost provinces. There are 488 mosques in the 25 provinces of the central region, 42 in the 13 provinces of the northern region, and 26 in the 15 provinces of the northeastern region. According to the RAD, 99 percent of these mosques are associated with the Sunni branch of Islam. Shi'a mosques make up the remaining 1 percent and are not located in the south, but are in Bangkok and the provinces of Nakhon Sithammarat and Krabi. There are 38 Provincial Islamic Committees nationwide.

According to the 2000 census, there are an estimated 438,600 Christians in the country, constituting 0.7 percent of the population. While there are a number of denominations, the Government recognizes five Christian umbrella organizations: the Catholic Mission of Bangkok (Roman Catholic); the Church of Christ in Thailand (Protestant); the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (Protestant); Saha Christchak (Baptist); and the Seventh-day Adventists. The oldest of these groupings, the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), was formed in 1934 and claims 1,080 churches and 149,125 adherents. The Catholic Mission of Bangkok has 406 churches and 333,240 believers. The Evangelical Foundation of Thailand has 1,200 churches and approximately 150,000 believers. The Seventh-day Adventists have approximately 200 churches and 12,712 members, and the Saha Christchak Baptists report 95 churches and 10,531 followers.

According to a 2002 government survey, there are nine recognized tribal groups (chao khao), comprised of approximately 920,000 persons. These groups generally practice syncretistic forms of Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and spirit worship.

The Secretary-General of the Sikh Council of Thailand estimates that there are up to 30,000 Sikhs. Although there are 16 Sikh temples, only 10 or 11 are active.

According to RAD statistics and local Hindu organizations, there are an estimated 100,000 Hindus and nine Hindu temples.

The majority of ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese practice Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism. There are more than 750 Chinese and Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist shrines and temples throughout the country. Included in this statistic are 20 Vietnamese temples, 17 Chinese temples, and 682 Chinese shrines that registered with the Ministry of Interior. Many ethnic Chinese, as well as members of the Mien hill tribe, practice forms of Taoism. Some ethnic Chinese also practice Christianity, mainly Protestantism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The 2007 Constitution states that unjust discrimination against a person on the grounds of differences in "religious belief" shall not be permitted, and there was no significant pattern of religious discrimination by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There is no state religion; however, Theravada Buddhism receives significant government support, and the 2007 Constitution retains the previous requirement that the monarch be Buddhist. The Constitution specifies that the state shall "protect Buddhism as the religion observed by most Thais for a long period of time and other religions, and shall also promote a good understanding and harmony among the followers of all religions as well as encourage the application of religious principles to create virtue and develop the quality of life."

The 2007 Constitution provides for, and citizens generally enjoyed, a large measure of freedom of speech; however, laws prohibiting speech likely to insult Buddhism remain in place. The 1962 Sangha Act (as amended, 1992) specifically prohibits the defamation or insult of Buddhism and the Buddhist clergy. Violators of the law could face up to one year imprisonment or fines of up to \$581 (20,000 baht). The 1956 Penal Code sections 206-208 (last amended in 1976) prohibit the

insult or disturbance of religious places or services of all officially recognized religions. Penalties range from imprisonment of one to seven years or a fine of \$58 to \$407 (2,000 to 14,000 baht).

During the reporting period, there were five officially recognized religious groups: Buddhists, Muslims, Brahmin-Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. The RAD, which is located in the Ministry of Culture, registers religious groups. Under the provisions of the Religious Organizations Act, and the relevant Regulations on Religious Organizations implemented in 1969 and amended in 1982, the RAD recognizes a new religious group if a national census shows that it has at least 5,000 adherents, has a uniquely recognizable theology, and is not politically active. A religious organization must also be accepted into at least one of the five existing recognized religious groups before the RAD will grant registration. Generally, the Government required that new groups receive acceptance from existing groups with similar belief systems. Government registration confers some benefits, including access to state subsidies, tax-exempt status, and preferential allocation of resident visas for organization officials. However, since 1984 the Government has not recognized any new religious groups. In practice unregistered religious groups operated freely, and the Government's practice of not recognizing any new religious groups did not restrict their activities.

The 2007 Constitution retains the past requirement that the Government "patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions." In accordance with this, the Government subsidizes activities of all five primary religious communities. The Government allocated approximately \$100 million (3.5 billion baht) for fiscal year 2009 to support the National Buddhism Bureau, which was established in 2002 as an independent state agency. The Bureau oversees the Buddhist clergy and approves the curriculums of Buddhist teachings for all Buddhist temples and educational institutions. In addition, it sponsors educational and public relations materials on Buddhism as it relates to daily life. For fiscal year 2009 the Government, through the RAD, budgeted approximately \$6.6 million (229 million baht) for Buddhist organizations, \$1.1 million (36.6 million baht) for Islamic organizations, and \$116,000 (4 million baht) for Christian, Brahmin-Hindu, and Sikh organizations. The RAD fiscal year 2009 budget also allocates funds for religious research, children's activities, and summer camps, as well as the Religious Promotion Project in the southern border provinces.

The budgets for Buddhist and Islamic organizations included funds to support Buddhist and Islamic institutes of higher education, fund religious education programs in public and private schools, provide daily allowances for monks and

Muslim clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts, and subsidize travel and health care for monks and Muslim clerics. Also included is an annual budget for the renovation and repair of temples and mosques, the maintenance of historic Buddhist sites, and the daily upkeep of the central mosque in Pattani. The National Buddhism Bureau allocated \$10.8 million (372 million baht) for the maintenance of Buddhist temples and institutions.

Other registered religious groups can request government support for renovation and repair work but do not receive a regular budget to maintain religious buildings, nor do they receive government assistance to support their clergy. In 2008 the RAD budgeted approximately \$517,000 (17.8 million baht) for the restoration of religious buildings of religious groups, of which \$378,000 (13 million baht) was allotted for the Muslim community and \$139,500 (4.8 million baht) for the Christian, Brahmin-Hindu, and Sikh communities. The RAD budget for fiscal year 2009 allocates \$581,000 (20 million baht) for the maintenance of religious buildings and locations of these groups. Private donations to registered religious organizations are tax deductible.

Religious groups proselytized freely. Monks working as Buddhist missionaries (dhammaduta) have long been active, particularly in border areas among the country's tribal populations. According to the National Buddhism Bureau there are 6,390 appointed dhammaduta working nationwide. In addition, the Government appointed 1,857 dhammaduta for international travel, and 1,460 are overseas working in 24 different countries. There are 318 registered Thai Buddhist temples abroad. There is also a newly-organized domestic religious dissemination program organized by the Supreme Sangha Council and the National Buddhism Bureau, which has recruited over 400 recently graduated monks with religious degrees to work in the provinces. In addition, the Supreme Sangha Council has launched a government-sponsored project encouraging men who are unemployed or otherwise adversely affected by the economic climate to be ordained as monks. Muslim and Christian missionaries do not receive public funds or state subsidies. Islamic organizations have small numbers of citizens working as missionaries in the country and abroad. Christian organizations have much larger numbers of missionaries operating in the country, both foreign and Thai, across all denominations. Sikh and Hindu-Brahmin have smaller numbers reflecting their proportional percentage of the population.

The Government observes Maka Bucha Day (the full moon day of the third lunar month, typically in February), Visakha Bucha Day (the full moon day of the sixth lunar month, typically in May), Asalaha Bucha Day (the full moon day of the

eighth lunar month, typically in July), and Khao Phan Sa Day (beginning of the Buddhist Lent, typically during the summer) as national holidays.

Religious education is required in public schools at both the primary and secondary education levels. In 2003, the Ministry of Education formulated a course called "Social, Religion, and Culture Studies," which students in each grade study for one to two hours each week. The course contains information about all of the recognized religions in the country. Students who wish to pursue in-depth studies of a particular religion may study at the religious schools and can transfer credits to the public school. Individual schools, working in conjunction with their local administrative boards, are authorized to arrange additional religious studies courses. The Supreme Sangha Council and the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand have created special curriculums for Buddhist and Islamic studies.

There are a variety of Islamic education opportunities for children. Tadika is an after-school religious course for children in grades one through six, which often takes place in a mosque. The RAD is responsible for overseeing the program, except in the provinces of Satun, Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, and parts of Songkhla Province, where the courses are supervised by the Ministry of Education. According to government statistics, there are currently 2,014 registered Islamic Religious and Moral Education centers teaching Tadika in the five southern provinces, with 230,656 students and 14,368 teachers. In the remainder of the country, the RAD registered 727 centers, with 83,404 students and 2,009 teachers.

For secondary school children, the Ministry of Education allows two separate curriculums for private Islamic schools. The first curriculum teaches both Islamic religious courses and traditional state education coursework. Currently 287 schools used this curriculum nationwide, with 7,945 teachers and 167,998 students. The Government recognizes these private schools and supports them financially, and graduating students can continue to higher education within the country. The second type teaches only Islamic religious courses. There are 277 schools nationwide, with 1,519 teachers and 25,603 students using this curriculum. The Government registers but does not certify these schools, and students from these schools cannot continue to any higher education within the country.

Traditional private Islamic day schools (pondoks), located primarily in the south, offer a third type of Islamic education. As of May 2009, according to the Government, there were 398 registered pondoks, 391 of which are in Songkhla, Satun, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Provinces. Registered pondoks receive government funding based on the number of teachers. Because pondoks were not

required to register until 2004, after a militant attack in which pondoks were thought to have played a role, the exact number of pondoks remains unknown. Credible sources believed that there could be as many as 1,000.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not recognize religious groups other than the five existing groupings; however, unregistered religious organizations operated freely during the reporting period.

The number of foreign missionaries registered with the Government is limited to an official quota established by the RAD in 1982. The quota system is organized along both religious and denominational lines. There were close to 1,600 registered foreign missionaries in the country, mostly Christians, during the reporting period. In addition to these formal quotas, many unregistered missionaries were able to live and work in the country without government interference. While registration conferred some benefits, such as longer terms for visa stays, being unregistered was not a significant barrier to foreign missionary activity. Many foreign missionaries entered the country using tourist visas and proselytized without RAD's acknowledgement. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were deported or harassed for working without registration.

Muslim professors and clerics, particularly in the far south, continue to face additional scrutiny because of ongoing government concern about Malay Muslim separatist activities. While this usually did not appear to inhibit their religious activities, government officials continued to be concerned that some Islamic schools were used by Malay Muslim extremists to indoctrinate youth into the conflict. Conversely, some reports concluded the Muslim insurgents target state schools and teachers because they perceived them to be part of an effort to impose Buddhist Thai culture on the region.

Government regulations prohibit female civil servants from wearing headscarves when dressed in civil servant uniforms, and most supervisors strictly adhere to this rule. However, superiors occasionally allowed female civil servants to wear headscarves if they wished, particularly in the southernmost provinces. Muslim female civil servants not required to wear uniforms were allowed to wear headscarves.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On April 9, 2009, three mainland Chinese members of Falun Gong were arrested at their home in Pattaya, one day prior to the ASEAN Summit Meeting held there, on immigration-related charges. The Special Branch and Immigration Police who conducted the raid on the home confiscated religious materials and a digital camera owned by the occupants. The religious materials were later returned to a Bangkok-based Falun Gong representative. All the detainees were transferred to the Bangkok Immigration Detention Center on April 26, 2009, and were to remain there without bail until a third country accepted them.

On March 19, 2009, the wife and four children of Imam Yapa Kaseng filed a civil suit against the Ministry of Defense, the Royal Thai Army, and the Royal Thai Police demanding \$436,000 (15 million baht) in compensation. This followed a ruling by the Narathiwat Court in December 2008 that the imam was killed in military custody. A military court had jurisdiction over this case; prosecutors had not initiated prosecution at the end of the reporting period. There was also a concurrent administrative investigation pending with the National Counter Corruption Commission.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

A clause retained in the 2007 Constitution requires the Government to "promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions." In accordance with this, during the reporting period, the Government actively sponsored interfaith dialogue through regular meetings and public education programs. The RAD was responsible for carrying out and overseeing many of these efforts. On August 18, 2008, the RAD held its annual interfaith assembly, and approximately 1,200 representatives and members of all registered religious groups participated. From May 12-14, 2009, the RAD sponsored a Youth Reconciliation Camp in Chonburi Province, just outside of Bangkok, that attracted 214 participants. Further, the Ministry of Public Health conducted a religious camp in Chiang Mai that brought together Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian youth to participate in activities that promoted religious reconciliation.

Other events included the Religious Relations Caravan (a relief project for the poor in January 2009), the celebrations for World Visakha Bucha Day (held during May 2009 in Bangkok and Nakhon, and involving approximately 2,000 participants), and Mobile Religions, Arts, and Cultures Program to the Southern Border Provinces (a series of events featuring religious exhibitions and seminars--the first event was in May 2008 in Natahiwat and the second was in June 2009 in Pattani.) In addition, the Police Crime Suppression Division in Bangkok conducted an interfaith seminar on crime prevention in January 2009. Members of the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian religious communities in Bangkok participated. Finally, a group of "peace ambassadors" comprised of representatives of the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian communities met with the 4th Army Chief, Pichet Wisaijorn, at the Sufficiency Economy Learning Center in Pattani in May 2009 for a peace conference.

The RAD has a religious interfaith subcommittee that is comprised of approximately 30 representatives from all religious groups in the country and RAD officials, and convenes every two months, or more frequently when planning events. The RAD also produces a weekly television program, *Thailand: Land of Good People*, as well as CDs/DVDs and the periodic newsletter, *Religion Direct*. In February 2007 the 17-member Subcommittee on Religious Relations, located within the Prime Minister's National Identity Promotion Office, reorganized to become the 30-member Subcommittee of Moral and Religious Promotion. The subcommittee's mission is to work with religious organizations, community leaders, youth networks, and the Government on how they might better apply religious principles and practices in their organizations. The subcommittee is chaired by a retired army general, Phongthep Thepprathep, and is composed of representatives from all five recognized organized religions, several government agencies and the private sector.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The majority of the deaths in the far south since the escalation of the conflict have been the result of Muslim on Muslim violence. However, violence perpetrated by ethnic Malay Muslim Thais against ethnic Thai Buddhists in the Deep South caused tensions between religious groups to remain high and invited retaliatory killings and human rights abuses by both groups. While the conflict in the south is primarily about ethnicity and nationalism, the close affiliation between ethnic and religious identity has caused it to take on religious overtones. As a result, there were a number of cases in which the

violence in the region undermined citizens' abilities to undertake the full range of their religious activities.

On June 8, 2009, a group of five or six gunmen with assault rifles attacked a mosque in Narathiwat during evening prayers, killing 11 (including the imam) and wounding more than a dozen. This attack triggered a series of violent reprisals, including the June 12 shooting of two Buddhist monks in Yala while they collected morning alms. The gunmen used AK-47s, killing one monk and seriously wounding the other. As a result, the Supreme Sangha Council ordered the monks in the Deep South to stop morning alms collection due to safety concerns. The National Buddhism Bureau was providing the approximately 1,000 monks in the area with subsistence expenses in the interim. On June 22, gunmen fired into a Buddhist temple in Narathiwat, wounding eight people.

The fifth anniversary of the 2004 Krue Se Mosque incident triggered a series of attacks in the Deep South in April 2009 that resulted in nine deaths and several injuries. Several NGOs in the region continued to call for the prosecution of the officers identified by the post-mortem inquest report of the Pattani Provincial Court as responsible for the original killings in 2004. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) stated in February 2009 that it had decided not to press charges against those officers. The relatives of the Krue Se victims received approximately \$39,000 (1.3 million baht) in compensation and victim assistance from the Government. Their civil suit is still pending.

During the political protests that occurred in Bangkok in April 2009, it was reported that rioters fired guns at the Daral Amarn mosque, and a confrontation between a group of local Muslims and anti-government demonstrators of unknown religious faith soon followed. Subsequent accusations of property destruction were leveled at both sides of the altercation. Police eventually intervened.

On February 16, 2009, in Waeng District in Narathiwat, five civilians were wounded in a bombing while a team of soldiers was escorting monks collecting alms.

On January 31, 2009, in Rue-Soh District in Narathiwat, a former Islamic religious teacher who sold goods near a local mosque was killed in a drive-by shooting.

There were at least three imams (Thais generally use the term "imam" to refer to religious leaders elected by the local mosque and appointed by the Provincial Islamic Committees) killed or injured during the reporting period: Imam

Abdulkarim Yusoh was fatally shot in front of a mosque in the Ban Kayi community in Pattani on January 30, 2009; Imam Muhammadsidee Pohsa was killed by rifle fire on November 3, 2008; and Imam Imron Salae was injured by gunfire on November 2, 2008.

During the first three months of 2009, there were at least seven beheadings (the victims were six Buddhists and one Muslim, both security officials and civilians) in the Deep South. The press speculated that Malay Muslim militants who believed the imams were killed by security forces committed these acts in retribution.

In September 2008, southern student activists organized a peaceful protest in Pattani to request that the midterm exams that were scheduled during the end of Ramadan be postponed to allow them to observe the holiday. University authorities granted this request. Despite the success of this endeavor, some NGOs reported concern that this had drawn additional security attention to the student movement.

Buddhist monks continued to report that they were fearful and thus no longer able to travel freely through southern communities to receive alms or perform rites. Often, as a safety precaution, they conducted religious rites that are customarily conducted in the evening in the afternoon. In response to the killings, the Government stationed troops to protect the religious practitioners and structures of all faiths in communities where the potential for violence existed and provided armed escort for Buddhist monks, where necessary, for their daily rounds to receive alms and during Buddhist festivals. However, government troops were often located within Buddhist temples, which some NGOs and ethnic Malay Muslims perceived as a militarization of Buddhist temples. Other NGOs viewed the military presence as a response to the prior attacks on Buddhist temples. Some temples declined to have military protection, both to avoid being targeted by militants, and also due to cost (the military units do not contribute to the increased electric and water bills). Therefore, many temples preferred to rely on Buddhist volunteers for security. In June 2009 a group of monks led by Reverend Surin Panyathipo submitted a formal complaint to the Government related to the difficulty practicing in the Deep South. They enumerated the challenges related to collecting alms because of the Buddhist migration out of the area and the threat to their physical well-being. However, the spokesman of the Supreme Sangha Council stated that they are recruiting monks nationwide to go to the Deep South for the three-month Buddhist Lent period in 2009 due to a severe monk shortage related to the violence there.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers regularly visit Muslim and Buddhist religious leaders, academics, and elected officials as part of the Embassy's goal of understanding the complex ethnic and religious issues at play in society. During the reporting period, the Embassy hosted three iftars to demonstrate respect for, and an understanding of, Islamic traditions, and to share information about Muslim life in the United States and the importance of religious freedom. The Embassy also organized several other cultural religious projects, including a painting project for students from Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian schools; a musical performance at the Islamic College of Thailand; and two speaking programs on Art and Muslim Life in America. In June 2009 the consul general and staff in Chiang Mai met with the Inter-faith Solidarity Committee, an organization founded in 2008 to promote long-term community reconciliation that includes members representing all five of the officially recognized religions.

During Fiscal Year 2008, the State Department selected nine Thai Muslims from a broad range of professions for the International Visitor Leadership Program and the Voluntary Visitor Program. During their visits to the United States, they observed individuals from all religious groups openly practice their faith freely and without conflict. In Fiscal Year 2009, the State Department again selected a group of Thai Muslims to participate in these programs. In addition, during the 2008-9 academic year, 31 Thai Muslim students studied at a U.S. high school, 20 as participants in the State Department-funded Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program and 11 through scholarships directly sponsored by Embassy Bangkok to participate in AFS high school exchange. During Fiscal Year 2009, the State Department accepted 19 Thai Muslims into the YES program, and the Embassy agreed to finance two additional scholarships for the AFS high school exchange. The Embassy also issued a grant to AFS to send 12 Thai Muslim teachers to the United States for a two-month training and observation visit. Finally, six Thai Muslims participated in a U.S. Government-funded citizen exchange trip to the United States entitled "Faith and Community."

TIBET

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs), counties, and townships in other provinces, as parts of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The U.S. Department of State follows these designations in its reporting. The United States continues to be concerned for the preservation and development of the Tibetan people's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and the protection of their fundamental human rights.

The Constitution of the PRC provides for freedom of religion but limits protection of the exercise of religious belief to activities the Government defines as "normal." The Government's 2005 White Paper on Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities states, "Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities." Organs of self-government are governments of autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties.

During the reporting period, the level of religious repression in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained high, especially around major religious holidays and sensitive anniversaries. Government control over religious practice and the day-to-day management of monasteries and other religious institutions continued to be extraordinarily tight due to continued fallout from the March 2008 outbreak of widespread unrest in Tibetan regions.

The Government continued to conduct "patriotic education" campaigns in monasteries, requiring monks and nuns to sign statements personally denouncing the Dalai Lama and to study communist political texts and propaganda praising the Chinese government's management of religious affairs. Noncompliant monks and nuns faced expulsion from their monasteries. Many monks and some abbots fled their monasteries to avoid complying.

The patriotic education campaigns and other restrictions on religious freedom were major factors leading monks and nuns from a number of monasteries to mount initially peaceful protests in Lhasa on March 10, 2008. On March 14 and 15, the protests and security response devolved into rioting by Tibetans and a violent police crackdown in Lhasa. Official state media reported the detentions of 4,434 persons in Tibetan areas (1,315 in Lhasa) between March and April 2008, although

some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) placed the number at more than 6,500. Many of these individuals were monks or nuns. The overall number of monks and nuns in the monasteries declined in the weeks and months following the protests and remained at lower levels than pre-March 2008. The government continued to criticize the Dalai Lama harshly in public, including through news outlets.

During the reporting period, Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns experienced difficulty traveling and hotels frequently denied them registration. They were also subject to extraordinary police checks and arbitrary searches. Such discriminatory treatment was particularly severe in large cities, including Beijing and Chengdu, before and during the 2008 Olympic Games. Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as lay Tibetans, continued to report difficulties obtaining passports from their local public security bureaus, a situation some have attributed in part to an official effort to hinder travel to Dharamsala, India, where the Dalai Lama resides. The Government increased personnel on the Tibet-Nepal border after the protests, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that fewer Tibetans arrived at the Tibet Reception Center in Nepal during the reporting period than in prior years.

The U.S. government encouraged the PRC Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom and preserve religious traditions. U.S. diplomatic personnel visited the TAR twice during the reporting period. TAR officials repeatedly denied U.S. diplomatic personnel's requests to visit Tibetan regions, limiting the ability of U.S. diplomatic personnel to travel freely and talk openly with persons in Tibetan areas. The U.S. government protested credible reports of religious persecution and discrimination, discussed individual cases with the authorities, and requested further information about specific incidents. The U.S. government continued to urge the PRC Government to engage in constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives and to address policies in Tibetan areas that have created tensions due to their impact on Tibetan religion, culture, and livelihoods.

Section I. Religious Demography

Tibetan areas total 871,649 square miles. According to recent official estimates, the Tibetan population within the TAR was approximately 2.4 million of a total permanently registered population of 2.8 million. These figures undercount non-Tibetans who have migrated to the TAR to pursue job and business opportunities. According to official statistics, the ethnic Tibetan population in the Tibetan

autonomous prefectures and counties of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces was 2.9 million. Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority also practices Bon, the related traditional Tibetan religion, and a smaller minority practices Islam. Many Tibetan government officials and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members are religious believers, despite government and CCP prohibitions against cadres practicing religion.

Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include ethnic Han Chinese, who practice Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; and Christians. Approximately 4,000 to 5,000 Muslims worship at mosques in the TAR; there is also a 560-member Catholic church located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. Tsodruk, in Dechen TAP, Yunnan Province, is also home to a Tibetan Catholic congregation. The TAR is home to a small number of Falun Gong adherents, as well as some unregistered Protestant churches.

The number of monks and nuns in monasteries continued to fluctuate significantly, due in part to the "patriotic education" campaigns, which sometimes resulted in the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of monks and nuns found "politically unqualified" or who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama. Other monks and nuns reportedly left their monasteries to take refuge from the authorities. According to the June 21, 2009 *People's Daily*, there are 3,000 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries with 120,000 monks and nuns in the TAR and Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. In the TAR, there are 1,789 religious venues with 46,000 monks and nuns. According to statistics collected by the China Center for Tibetan Studies, a government research institution, there are 1,535 monasteries in Tibetan areas outside the TAR. Informed observers estimate 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in Tibetan areas outside the TAR. The figures have varied over time for a number of reasons, including government policy, politically motivated detentions, monastic secularization, and commercialization due to tourism. The widespread practice of monasteries accepting unregistered novices and other monks compounds the difficulty in estimating the true number of practicing Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns. Authorities in the TAR and other Tibetan areas tightened enforcement of longstanding regulations that forbid monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of 18, hindering the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training. However, there were monks as young as eight years of age at some monasteries. Many monks studied and worshiped within their monasteries without being "registered" or obtaining an official monastic identification card issued by religious affairs authorities. Hence, two population figures exist for many monasteries, the

official number reflecting the number of monks allowed by the government, and the actual figure, which may be twice the official number or even higher, and which includes both registered and unregistered monks.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The PRC Constitution and laws provide for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe, although the Constitution protects only religious activities defined as "normal." The Constitution states that religious bodies and affairs are not to be "subject to any foreign control." The Government sought to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered religious groups and places of worship, as well as to control the growth and scope of the activity of registered and unregistered religious groups. The Government remained wary of Tibetan Buddhism and its links to the Dalai Lama, and tightly controlled religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas.

Officials from the CCP's United Front Work Department, which oversees the implementation of Beijing's Tibet policies, and envoys of the Dalai Lama continued to conduct talks during the reporting period, meeting in July and November 2008 in Beijing. Prior rounds of formal talks between the Dalai Lama's envoys and government officials occurred annually from 2002 to 2007.

Patriotic education campaigns intensified dramatically following the March 2008 unrest and remained frequent throughout the reporting period. Increasing "legal education" at monasteries and nunneries was a major theme of political education campaigns and reflected the Government's desire to influence monks and nuns not to engage in "illegal" protests and gatherings. As part of these campaigns, monks and nuns were required to affirm that Tibet is an inalienable part of the PRC, in many cases to denounce the Dalai Lama, and to express allegiance to the government-appointed Panchen Lama. The primary responsibility for conducting monastic political education remained with monks selected by the Government at each monastery. In some cases, religious affairs officials directed the content of monks' and nuns' religious teachings and forced them to include positive remarks about Chinese leaders and Communist Party religious policies. While the form, content, and frequency of patriotic training at monasteries varied widely, the conduct of such training remained a requirement and was a routine part of monastic management.

For instance, in March 2009, a public notice posted in Kumbum (Ta'er) Monastery in Qinghai Province said monks must be "patriotic" and warned that they would face expulsion if they "damage[d] the image of the monastery" or broke any laws. Several media sources reported frustration with such campaigns among Tibetan Buddhists was an ongoing source of unrest in Tibetan areas both inside and outside the TAR. Government Order No. 2 of June 2008 authorizes the detention of monks and nuns for re-education and allows authorities to expel insubordinate religious leaders from their monasteries. Officials in Ganzi (Kardze), Sichuan Province, issued the order. Monasteries that do not cooperate can be "removed from the list of registered religious institutions and closed down." These new measures provide a legal basis for activities the Government was already undertaking in the TAR and the TAPs.

Rules and regulations that provide a legal basis for government control over Tibetan religious traditions continued to be enforced. These included the Management Measures on Reincarnation (MMR) issued by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), which codified government assertion of control over the selection of Tibetan religious leaders and reincarnate lamas. The regulations stipulate that local governments at the city level and above have the power to deny permission for a Tibetan Buddhist lama to be reincarnated. At least provincial-level governments must approve reincarnations, while the State Council reserves the right to deny the reincarnation of living Buddhas of "especially great influence." The regulations state no foreign organization or individual can interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within the PRC.

The TAR Implementation of the PRC Religious Affairs Regulations (the Implementing Regulations) issued by SARA continued to assert state control over all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious groups, venues, and personnel. The TAR government has the right under the Implementing Regulations to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders. The Implementing Regulations codified the practice of controlling the movement of nuns and monks, also requiring them to seek permission from county-level religious affairs officials to travel to another prefecture or county-level city within the TAR to study or teach.

In Tibetan Buddhism, visiting different monasteries and religious sites for specialized training by experts in their particular theological tradition is a key component of religious education. The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) reported that monks and nuns who went to India claimed their main reasons for

choosing to leave Tibet were to continue their studies, which they believed they were unable to do inside Tibet, and to obtain a blessing from the Dalai Lama. Travel restrictions are partly to blame for the continuing decline in the quality of monastic education in Tibetan areas of China.

The Implementing Regulations also gave the Government formal control over the building and management of religious structures and over large-scale religious gatherings. Official permission is required for all monastic construction and "reconstructing, extending, or repairing religious venues." Likewise, monasteries must request permission to hold large or important religious events. During the reporting period, the TAR government continued to control Tibetan Buddhist religious relics tightly, maintaining that the relics, along with religious institutions themselves, were state property.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials often associated Buddhist monasteries with pro-independence activism in Tibetan areas. In practice, the Government regulated the operations of major monasteries through Democratic Management Committees (DMCs) composed of monastic leaders who generally complied with directions from local religious affairs bureaus (RABs). In most cases, the Government did not contribute to the monasteries' operating funds. Regulations restricted leadership of DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specified that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some monasteries, government officials were among the members of the committees. Although authorities permitted many traditional religious ceremonies and practices and public manifestations of belief during the reporting period, they rigorously confined most religious activities to officially designated places of worship and maintained tight control over religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypeople. The Government forcibly suppressed activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence.

The Government stated that there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries and that each monastery's DMC could decide independently how many monks the monastery could support. In practice, however, the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR and Sichuan's Ganzi (Kardze) TAP.

In the TAR and in Tibetan areas of Sichuan Province, as part of "patriotic education" campaigns, the Government reportedly removed hundreds of young

monks from monasteries and hundreds of schoolchildren from schools attached to monasteries. Such children were placed in public schools to receive officially mandated compulsory education. During the reporting period, local authorities frequently pressured parents, especially those who were CCP members or government employees, to withdraw their children from monasteries in their hometowns, private schools attached to monasteries, and Tibetan schools in India. In some cases, local authorities confiscated identity documents of parents whose children were studying at Tibetan schools in India as a means of forcing the parents to make their children return home.

Authorities closely supervised the education of lamas approved by the Government. For example, the education of the current Reting Rinpoche, who is 11 years old (born October 3, 1997), differed significantly from that of his predecessors. Government officials, rather than religious leaders, managed the selection of his religious and lay tutors.

The Government severely restricted contact between several important reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, the 11th Pawo Rinpoche, whom the 17th Karmapa recognized in 1994, remained under official supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have repeatedly been refused permission to visit him. The Government also refused requests by international observers to meet Buddhist figures such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the Panchen Lama.

The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained inadequate. Many teachers were in exile in India and elsewhere, older teachers were not replaced, and those who remained in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in other parts of China or abroad, or even within the TAR. After March 2008, many monks originally from other Tibetan areas were expelled from monasteries in Lhasa even if they had lived in the monasteries for as long as 20 years. The leaders of all major schools of Tibetan Buddhism lived abroad. For example, the Karmapa, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu school and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, remained in exile after departing the TAR in 1999. The Karmapa said he left because of government controls over his movements and the Government's refusal to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him.

In recent years, DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds from the sale of entrance tickets or pilgrims' donations for purposes other than the support

of monks engaged in full-time religious study. Although local government officials' attempts to attract tourists to religious sites provided some monasteries with extra income, such activities also deflected time and energy from religious instruction.

Spiritual leaders reportedly encountered difficulty reestablishing historical monasteries in rural areas due to lack of funding and government denials of permission to build and operate religious institutions. Officials in some areas contended these religious venues drained local resources and served as a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. However, in some areas, the Government restored monasteries as a means to promote tourism and boost revenue.

Tibetan residents in a community outside the TAR that had been the scene of major protests in March 2008 reported continued restrictions during the reporting period on their ability to access the local monastery, with security forces limiting the number of times per week they could enter the monastery to worship. In August 2008, an annual religious festival tens of thousands of persons normally attended at Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province was cancelled, reportedly due to official desire to prevent any incidents from taking place during the Olympic Games.

Authorities permitted resumption of the Geshe Lharampa examinations, the highest religious examination in the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, in July 2004 after a 16-year ban. On April 12, 2009, nine monks from Tashi Lhunpo, Gandan, and Magon Monasteries passed the Geshe exam. The ban on the Great Prayer Festival (Monlam Chenmo), which is closely associated with the Geshe exam process, remained in effect. Traditionally, hundreds of thousands of Tibetans gathered in Lhasa during the Monlam Chenmo; however, public celebration of the festival has been banned since 1990. Approximately 100 monks conducted the Monlam Chenmo at the Jokhang Temple in 2009. Restrictions on religious education made it difficult for monks to receive the level of instruction necessary to take or pass the Geshe Lharampa exam. Monks who wished to sit for the exam traditionally traveled to the TAR to study at such monasteries as Sera and Drepung; however, restrictions on the movement of monks from one monastery to another within the Tibetan areas of China made it difficult to receive advanced religious education. These restrictions, along with regulations on the transfer of religious relics between monasteries, weakened the strong traditional ties between large monasteries in the Lhasa area and affiliates throughout Tibetan areas.

Restrictions sometimes were applied even to monks visiting other monasteries within the same county for short-term study or teaching. Since the unrest in March 2008, monks in several Tibetan areas reported that they were unable to leave their home monasteries. In March 2009 a public notice in Kumbum (Ta'er) Monastery required monks wishing to go on leave to obtain permission from superiors. During the period in March 2009 that coincided with the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising and the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile, numerous monasteries experienced disruptions in cellular telephone, text messaging, Internet, and other communication services.

After the outbreak of violence on March 14, 2008, security forces blocked access to and from important monasteries, including those in the Lhasa area. Nighttime police raids removed many monks from important monasteries in Lhasa in the first few months after the March 2008 crackdown. A heavy police presence in the monasteries restricted the movement of monks and prevented "unauthorized" visits, including those by foreign journalists. Similar restrictions were in place in March 2009, when foreign journalists were prevented from entering most Tibetan areas. On March 9, the Foreign Correspondents Club of China issued a statement saying reporters from six news organizations had been detained in Tibetan areas of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces, even though, unlike the TAR, these areas were open to foreign journalists.

The Government increased security measures during sensitive anniversaries and festival days in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. After many Tibetans inside and outside China called for a cancellation of Tibetan New Year (Losar) celebrations out of respect for those who died as a result of the March 14, 2008 riots and subsequent protests, government officials in many Tibetan communities ordered monks to celebrate the holiday, which fell on February 25. In March 2009, authorities in Lhasa heightened security in major monasteries to control possible gatherings to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1959 unsuccessful Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule.

Some government officials maintained there was no law against possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama, but rather most Tibetans chose not to display his picture. However, the Implementing Regulations state that "religious personnel and religious citizens may not distribute books, pictures, or other materials that harm the unity of the nationalities or endanger state security." Some officials deemed photos of and books by or about the Dalai Lama as materials that violated the Implementing Regulations.

Nevertheless, many Tibetans displayed photos of the Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama-recognized 11th Panchen Lama in their homes, in lockets, and on cellular telephones. The ability of Tibetans to display the Dalai Lama's picture varied regionally and with the political climate.

In major monasteries, especially those that attract large numbers of tourists, pictures of the Dalai Lama were not openly displayed. His picture also could not be purchased openly in the TAR or other Tibetan areas of China. Merchants who ignored the restrictions and sold Dalai Lama-related images and audiovisual material reported that authorities frequently imposed fines. In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, visitors to several monasteries saw pictures of the Dalai Lama prominently displayed, although monks reported that they would temporarily remove such photos during inspections by RAB and other officials. During an "anti-crime" crackdown in Lhasa in January 2009, police searched homes and businesses, in addition to personal cell phones and other electronic devices, for "illicit" images (including images of the Dalai Lama) and music. According to numerous reports, authorities in many Tibetan areas confiscated or defaced photographs of the Dalai Lama in monasteries and private residences following the March 2008 unrest. Furthermore, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos or material as evidence of separatist sentiment. The Government also continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the man widely recognized as the Panchen Lama.

Authorities prohibited the registration of names for children that included one or more of the names of the Dalai Lama or certain names included on a list of blessed names approved by the Dalai Lama. As a result, many Tibetans have a name they use in daily life and a different, government-approved name for interactions with government officials.

The prohibition against celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6 continued during the reporting period.

Many Tibetan religious people in Ganzi and Aba Prefectures in Sichuan were unable to obtain a passport during the reporting period. The application process was not transparent, and reported obstacles ranged from bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption to denials based on the applicant's political activities or religious beliefs. There were instances in which authorities confiscated previously issued passports. In some cases, high-ranking monks and Living Buddhas were able to obtain a passport only after promising not to travel to India. Many other passport

applications were simply denied. Monks and nuns have experienced greater difficulty obtaining passports since the March 2008 unrest.

Difficulty obtaining a passport continued to limit the ability of Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. Passport and border controls became tighter following the unrest that began in March 2008, making legal foreign travel more difficult and illegal border crossings nearly impossible. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, hundreds of Tibetans, including monks and nuns, traveled to India via third countries, and most of them sought refugee status in India. The number of Tibetans who returned to China after temporary stays in India was unknown but reportedly declined significantly from previous years. The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 596 Tibetans arrived at the Tibet Reception Center in Nepal in 2008, compared to 2,156 in 2007. There were continuing reports that the Government detained Tibetans seeking to cross the border from China to Nepal illegally to go to India. Such detentions reportedly lasted as long as several months and sometimes took place without formal charges.

In 2007, approximately 615 Tibetan religious figures held positions in local National Peoples Congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The CPPCC is a political advisory body that nominally serves to allow non-Communist Party delegates to participate in the administration of state affairs. Some Tibetan religious figures accepted government positions and openly practiced Buddhism.

Travel restrictions for foreign visitors to and within the TAR and to other Tibetan areas continued during the period covered by this report, and the Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites in the TAR. Foreign media were completely barred from the TAR, with the exception of a small number of closely monitored government-organized trips. Foreign visitors were often turned around at police roadblocks or denied bus tickets in Tibetan areas outside the TAR, ostensibly for safety reasons, while Chinese tourists passed unhindered. Local government officials were often reluctant to say whether confidential travel bans were in effect. In accordance with a 1989 regulation, any foreign visitor was required to obtain an official confirmation letter issued by the Government before entering the TAR. On April 5, 2009, the TAR formally reopened for foreign tourists who had obtained a TAR travel permit.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 10, 2008, monks and nuns in Lhasa and Tibetan areas of Gansu, Sichuan, and Qinghai provinces held peaceful demonstrations to mark the 49th anniversary of the unsuccessful Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule and to protest government policies, including restrictions on religious freedom. Following the spread of reports that security forces arrested protestors in Lhasa, monks from Drepung, Sera, and Ganden monasteries, as well as nuns from the Chutsang nunnery, demonstrated against the arrests. After two days of protests, police began to use tear gas to disperse the monks and nuns and then surrounded major monasteries in Lhasa. According to reports, on March 14, when the People's Armed Police (PAP) confronted a group of monks from Ramoche Monastery protesting near the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tibetan onlookers began pulling up paving stones and throwing them at police. Police withdrew from the area, and Tibetan crowds began attacking Han and Hui civilians and their businesses. According to media reports, police forcibly regained control of Lhasa by the evening of March 15. The Government then closed monasteries and nunneries in Lhasa, imposed a curfew, and prohibited foreign media from entering the TAR.

In the days and weeks following the violence in Lhasa, protests -- nearly all of them peaceful -- spread across Tibetan areas, including Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu provinces. The Government responded with increased police and military presence in these areas. By March 27, 2008, more than 42 county-level locations, as well as the cities of Chengdu, Lanzhou, and Beijing, reported protest activity. According to researchers at Columbia University, there were approximately 125 documented protest incidents between mid-March and early June 2008. A forceful security response interrupted many protests that began peacefully, although in a small number of cases, local authorities effectively defused escalating tension through negotiation and dialogue with local religious figures.

Following the March 2008 protests, the Government further tightened its already strict control over access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, making it difficult to determine the scope of religious freedom violations. These controls remained during the reporting period. Respect for religious freedom in the TAR and other Tibetan areas deteriorated in the months following the violent unrest and remained poor throughout the reporting period. Authorities curtailed or tightly controlled numerous religious festivals and celebrations because they feared that these events would become venues for anti-government protests.

The number of monks and nuns at several monasteries decreased after the protests of spring 2008. Information about the locations of many who had been arrested was difficult to confirm. There were reports of ongoing mass detentions of monks and of monasteries being sealed off by police and military personnel, who routinely blocked cellular phone and Internet access, as "patriotic education" campaigns intensified. More than 80 nuns reportedly were detained in Sichuan Province after March 2008.

According to numerous sources, many of those detained were subjected to extrajudicial punishments, such as beatings and deprivation of food, water, and sleep for long periods. In some cases, detainees reportedly suffered broken bones and other serious injuries at the hands of PAP and Public Security Bureau (PSB) officers. According to sources who claimed to be eyewitnesses, the bodies of some people who were killed during the violence or who died during interrogation were disposed of secretly rather than being returned to their families.

In April 2009, Tulku Phurbu Tsering Rinpoche went on trial for weapons charges related to protests that took place in 2008 in Kardze County, Sichuan. Police charged they found weapons in his home; the monk and his Beijing-based lawyer insisted the weapons were planted and he confessed after being tortured. He faced up to 15 years' imprisonment if found guilty. On April 28, judgment on the case was postponed.

On March 25, 2009, according to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), PSB personnel beat to death Phuntsok, a monk from the Drango Monastery in Kardze, after he passed out leaflets on the property of PSB headquarters.

On March 24, 2009, two nuns, Yangkyi Dolma and Sonam Yangchen, of Dragkar Nunnery in Kardze, Sichuan Province, were reportedly detained and beaten for staging a protest at the Kardze County market square. Yangkyi Dolma allegedly distributed a handful of handwritten pamphlets, and both nuns shouted pro-Tibet slogans before PAP officers beat them and took them away.

On March 21, 2009, nearly 100 monks from the Ragya Monastery rioted in the Golog TAP of Qinghai Province. International media reported the riot started after a local monk who was questioned for advocating Tibetan independence ran away from the police station and jumped into the Yellow River to commit suicide.

According to a Xinhua report, on March 9, 2009, a monk named Sheldrup died after reportedly committing suicide due to "stress." In April 2008, Chinese authorities detained and severely beat Sheldrup following peaceful protests. After releasing him, authorities published his name on "wanted" signs, which indicated they would detain him again. Sheldrup left his monastery and went into hiding until his death.

On March 6, 2009, according to the TCHRD, Lobsang Khandro, a nun from Gema Dra-wok Nunnery in Kardze, was arrested for staging a solo protest march. A few minutes into the march, police beat Khandro and took her into custody.

In November 2008, Jigme Guri, a monk at Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province, was rearrested after filming a video, later posted on YouTube, in which he detailed beatings by prison authorities during two months of detention beginning March 21, 2008. According to Jigme, the beatings left him unconscious for six days, and he required two hospitalizations. On November 4, 2008, authorities reportedly detained Jigme again for unknown reasons. Jigme was released in May 2009.

On March 14, 2008, Chinese authorities detained Tendar after he attempted to prevent police from beating a monk. Police reportedly tortured Tendar during his detention, causing serious bodily injuries that led to his death on June 19, 2008.

Limited access to information about prisoners and prisons made it difficult to ascertain the number of Tibetan prisoners of conscience or to assess the extent and severity of abuses. According to the Congressional Executive Commission on China's Political Prisoner Database, as of July 2009, there were 689 Tibetan prisoners of conscience, 439 of whom were monks or nuns.

On April 11, 2009, in Nagchu County, PSB officers reportedly detained Khensur Thupten Thapkey, a former abbot of Shapten Monastery, and scripture master Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltzen. A third monk, Tsundue of Shapten Monastery's Democratic Management Committee, was also detained.

In April 2009, Dokru Tsultrim, a monk from Ngaba Gomang Monastery in Ngaba County, Ngaba, TAP, Sichuan Province, was arrested for writing two articles critical of the Government. His current whereabouts are unknown.

In March 2009, Chinese authorities re-arrested Jigme Gyatso, who was previously arrested in March 2008 and then released in October 2008, for providing

assistance to the makers of the documentary film "Leaving Fear Behind." Gyatso, also known as Golog Jigme, was a monk at Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province. Gyatso's whereabouts were unknown.

No information was available on the fate of monks who protested in front of a group of foreign journalists at Lhasa's Jokhang Temple on March 27, 2008. Monks involved in a similar protest in front of foreign journalists at the Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province on April 9, 2008 were reportedly arrested. Five of the Labrang monks later escaped to India.

In March 2009, four nuns of Puru-na Nunnery in Kardze were sentenced to prison for their role in a 50-person protest at Kardze County headquarters on May 14, 2008. Tashi Lhamo, Youghal Khando, and Serka were each sentenced to two years in prison. Rinzin Choetso received a three-year sentence. The whereabouts of seven other nuns involved in the protest remained unknown.

In February 2009, nine monks from the Samye Monastery were sentenced to prison terms varying from two to 15 years for their participation in the March 2008 protests at the Samye government administrative headquarters in Dranang County. A 10th monk was reported to have committed suicide.

On January 24, 2009, seven monks, including chant leader Nima Tsering, were arrested in connection with a demonstration of 300 monks at the Den Choekhor Monastery in Jomda County. The monks were protesting the planned participation of a local Tibetan dance troupe in the Serf Emancipation Day celebrations organized by the Government.

On January 15, 2009, three nuns were each sentenced to two and a half years in prison for staging a protest in Kardze County on June 18, 2008. The three nuns, Poewang, Lhamo, and Yangzom, were being held in a prison in Chengdu. Sources reported that at least 44 other nuns were being held in the prison.

On January 2, 2009, Yangkyi, a nun at Dragkar Nunnery in Kardze, was sentenced to one year and nine months in prison for her role in a May 12, 2008 protest.

In October 2008, two monks from the Ratoe Monastery in Chushul County were sentenced to prison for their role in the March 15 riot at the Chushul County government headquarters. According to the Xinhua news agency, Lobsang Tsephel was sentenced to nine years and Tsenam to five years.

In June 2008, the Intermediate Court in Lhoka, TAR sentenced nine monks to prison for two to 15 years in connection with protests at a government building in Dranang County, Lhoka, on March 18, 2008. Those sentenced included Tenzin Bhuchung of Langthang Monastery and Gyaltzen, of Samye Monastery, who each received 15-year sentences. Tenzin Zoepa of Jowo Monastery was given a 13-year sentence. Nima Tashi and Phuntsok, also of Samye Monastery, were each sentenced to 13 years in prison.

No new information available on Rongye Adak, who was arrested on August 1, 2008, in Ganzi, TAP after calling for the Dalai Lama's return. He was convicted of inciting separatism and sentenced to eight years in prison.

On March 21, 2009, Tashi Sangpo, a monk at the Ragya Monastery in Qinghai, killed himself after being arrested on suspicion of promoting Tibetan independence.

After March 2008, several monks and nuns committed suicide as a means of protest against government restrictions, including restrictions on religious freedom in the TAR and other Tibetan regions.

On February 27, 2009, the monk Taby of Kirti Monastery in Ngaba (Aba) Prefecture, Sichuan Province, committed self-immolation.

According to the blog of Tibetan poet and human rights activist Woesser, the following monks and nuns committed suicide as a form of protest. On March 23, 2008, at the Ramoche Temple in Lhasa, the monk Thogme hanged himself. On March 27, 2008, at the Garden Monastery in Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, the monk Lobsang Jinpa hanged himself. At the Guomang Temple, a monk killed himself. On April 12, 2008, in Lhasa's Meltro Gongkar County, at the Choelung Nunnery, Lobsang Tsomo hanged herself. On April 16, 2008, in Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province at the Kirti Monastery, the blind monk Toisam killed himself.

No new information is available about the Nangpa La Pass incident of September 2006 when PRC border guards shot and killed Buddhist nun Kelsang Namtso. Border guards took into custody 25 individuals from a group of 70 Tibetans crossing the border.

Gendun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the Panchen Lama, and Tenzin Delek Rinpoche remained in detention or prison, as did dozens of monks and nuns who resisted

patriotic education campaigns. Diplomats and NGOs advocated for international access to Nyima, who turned 20 years old on April 25, 2009. In July 2007, the Vice Chairman of the TAR told foreign journalists Nyima was a high school student in the TAR and had "asked not to be disturbed." The Government continued to insist that Bainqen Erdini Qoigyijabu (born Gyaltzen Norbu on February 13, 1990), whom it selected in 1995, is the Panchen Lama's 11th reincarnation.

The Government did not provide any information on Lama Chadrel Rinpoche, who reportedly remained under house arrest for leaking information about the selection of the Panchen Lama.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Since ethnicity and religion are often linked in many parts of China, it is difficult to categorize many incidents solely as ethnic or religious intolerance. Tensions among ethnic groups in Tibetan areas, including the Han, the Muslim Hui, and others, remained high during the reporting period. Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns reported that they were frequently denied registration at hotels particularly during sensitive times, including the period around the Beijing Olympics. Tensions between individuals of different religious beliefs in the TAR and TAPs were also related to economic competition.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas, using focused pressure in cases of abuse. In regular exchanges, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel consistently urged both the Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

Embassy and Consulate General officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination.

U.S. diplomatic personnel in the country maintained contacts with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom. After the outbreak of unrest in the TAR and other Tibetan areas in March 2008, U.S. Government officials repeatedly requested diplomatic access to affected areas, but authorities denied most of these requests. Unpublished restrictions on travel by foreigners into the TAR and other Tibetan areas imposed in March 2008 resulted in U.S. diplomats and other foreigners being turned back, ostensibly for their own safety, at police roadblocks, or being refused transportation on public buses to Tibetan areas outside the TAR that were officially open to foreign visitors. These incidents continued in the reporting period, particularly in March 2009.

TIMOR-LESTE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 5,406 square miles and a population of 1.1 million. According to a 2005 report from the World Bank, 98 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 1 percent Protestant, and less than 1 percent Muslim. Protestant denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Christian Vision Church. There are also a number of small, nondenominational Protestant congregations. Most Timorese also retain some vestiges of animistic beliefs and practices, which they have come to regard as more cultural than religious.

The country had a significant Muslim population during the Indonesian occupation, composed mostly of ethnic Malay immigrants from Indonesian islands. There also were a few ethnic Timorese converts to Islam, as well as a small number descended from Arab Muslims living in the country while it was under Portuguese colonial rule prior to 1975. The latter group was well integrated into society, but ethnic Malay Muslims often were not, and only a few hundred remained in the country following independence in 2002.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no official state religion; however, Catholic values remain prominent in the political life of the country. Members of Protestant and Muslim communities also have some political influence and have held high positions in the executive and legislative branches of government, and in the military.

Since 2007 the Secretary of State for Security has had authority to register religious organizations; however, this agency had not yet developed registration procedures by the end of the reporting period.

An October 2003 law on immigration and asylum states that "foreigners cannot provide religious assistance to the Defense and Security Forces, except in cases of absolute need and urgency." Based in part on this law, immigration authorities established residence and visa fees for foreigners residing in the country. Missionaries and other religious figures were exempt from paying these fees.

Police cadets receive training in equal enforcement of the law and nondiscrimination, including religious nondiscrimination.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were several credible reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities generally are friendly in the capital of Dili; however, outside of the capital, non-Catholic religious groups are sometimes viewed with suspicion.

During the reporting period, credible sources reported four incidents of societal abuses or discrimination in the country against a Protestant denomination established by foreign missionaries. No fatalities were reported.

On March 15, 2009, a Protestant missionary church in Ainaro reported the church was illegally locked to prevent services from being held. United Nations Police (UNPOL) and the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) reportedly spoke with the instigators, who refused to remove the lock and said the Protestant church should leave. Church activities were suspended temporarily but later resumed.

On February 22, 2009, a group of local residents and youth appeared at the inauguration of a Protestant missionary church in Liquica to stone the church and demand the foreign missionaries leave the country. Windows were broken and three minor injuries were reported. The Portuguese Republican National Guard (GNR), which operates in Timor-Leste as part of an international peacekeeping force, appeared at the scene and peacefully dispersed the crowds.

On December 7, 2008, a group of approximately 800 persons conducted a prayer vigil outside a Protestant missionary church in Aileu to press for its closure. The PNTL arrived at the scene and unsuccessfully attempted to disperse the crowd. On the following day, a contingent of the GNR arrived on the scene and dispersed the crowd peacefully. The GNR reminded the protestors that Timor-Leste is a democracy and that freedom of religion is protected and enshrined in its Constitution.

Protests at the missionary church in Aileu began on November 20, 2008, when a group of local residents and youth appeared at the newly built Protestant church and stoned the building. The protestors insisted the country is a Catholic nation, demanded the missionaries leave, then dispersed voluntarily after a couple of hours. Windows were broken but no injuries were reported. Following the incident, local authorities asked the church to temporarily suspend its activities. The church reopened two weeks later after making repairs. At the end of the reporting period, the Office of the Prosecutor General was investigating the incidents.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government regularly expresses support to government leaders for consolidation of constitutional democracy, including respect for basic human rights such as religious freedom.

In addition, the U.S. government maintained a dialogue with members of the National Parliament during their deliberations on legislation affecting religious freedom. The U.S. government supported the justice sector to encourage the development of judicial institutions to promote the rule-of-law and ensure respect for religious freedom as guaranteed in the Constitution.

TOGO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 21,925 square miles and a population of 6.3 million. The Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004 estimated the population to be 33 percent traditional animist, 28 percent Roman Catholic, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, 10 percent Protestant, and 10 percent Christians of other denominations. The remaining 5 percent includes persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many converts to the more widespread religious groups continue to perform rituals that originated in indigenous religious groups.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians live mainly in the south.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution explicitly prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion, ethnic group, or region.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Tabaski, and Christmas.

The Government recognizes three main religious groups as state religions: Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. The Government requires other religious groups to register as associations. Official recognition as an association affords a group the same rights as the state religions. Officially recognized religious groups can receive import duty benefits for humanitarian and development projects but must request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Organizations must submit applications for registration to the Office of Political and Civil Organizations Affairs in the Ministry of Territorial Administration. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the group leader's diploma, a site use agreement, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. Criteria for recognition include the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The Office of Political and Civil Organizations Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigation and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

Unlike during previous reporting periods, the Government did not reject the applications of any religious groups.

The High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication, the commission that monitors the media, prohibits political discussions on religious radio and television stations.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block city streets. Officials routinely grant these requests. The Civil Security Division handles complaints associated with a religious organization, particularly noise complaints related to celebrations at night. The Ministry of Security sends security forces to address complaints.

Religion classes are not part of the curriculum in public schools. However, Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are numerous, and the Government provides them with teachers and staff personnel and pays their salaries.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Members of different religious groups regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Intermarriage between persons of different religious groups was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among various Protestant denominations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy organized activities to inform the public about religious diversity, values, and culture in the United States. The Embassy distributed publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The Embassy included religious leaders, particularly Muslim leaders, in the International Visitors Program and continued an English language program that contained segments about religious pluralism in the United States.

TONGA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago with a land area of 288 square miles and a population of 102,000. According to census data from 2006, membership by percentage of population of major religious groups was: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 37.3 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 16.8 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 15.6 percent; and Roman Catholic Church, 11.3 percent. All other Christian denominations, namely the Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, and Anglicans, account for 14 percent. The Baha'i Faith, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism together make up 4 percent and the remaining 1 percent declined to state their religious affiliation, if any.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the Government for tax purposes but is not required. All religious groups are

permitted duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax-exempt status.

The Constitution states that Sunday, the Sabbath day, is to be "kept holy" and that no business can be conducted, "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all other businesses, regardless of a business owner's religion.

A number of religious groups, including Mormons, Free Wesleyan Church, Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists, operated schools in the country.

The Government observes Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day as official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

The government-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintains policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines state that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." All religious groups are permitted to host programs on Radio Tonga and TV Tonga, but discussions of the basic tenets of non-Christian religions are not permitted. Notices of activities of all churches were broadcast on both Radio Tonga and TV Tonga as well as on privately owned radio and television stations.

Foreign missionaries are active in the country and operate freely.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government did not maintain a resident Embassy in the country; the U.S. Ambassador in Suva, Fiji, is accredited to the Government of Tonga. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Fiji held discussions with Wesleyan, Mormon, Catholic, and Baha'i officials as well as nongovernmental organizations, such as the Catholic Women's League, during visits to the country.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,980 square miles and a population of 1.3 million. Approximately 40 percent of the population is of African descent and 40 percent of East Indian descent. The balance is mostly of European, Syrian, Lebanese, Chinese, or mixed descent.

According to the latest unofficial estimates (2006), 26 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24.6 percent Protestant (including 7.8 percent Anglican, 6.8 percent Pentecostal, 4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 3.3 percent Presbyterian or Congregational, 1.8 percent Baptist, and 0.9 percent Methodist), 1.6 percent members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 22.5 percent Hindu, and 5.8 percent Muslim. Traditional Caribbean religious groups with African roots include the Spiritual Baptists (sometimes called Shouter Baptists), 5.4 percent, and the Orisha, 0.1 percent. Those listed as "other" account for 10.7 percent, which includes numerous small Christian groups as well as Baha'is, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and a very small number of Jews.

The Catholic and Anglican churches noted a decline in church attendance and the number of priests.

Afro-Trinidadians are predominantly Christian, with a small Muslim community, and are concentrated in and around Port of Spain and the east-west corridor of

Trinidad. The population of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago, is overwhelmingly of African descent and predominantly Christian. Indo-Trinidadians are primarily concentrated in central and southern Trinidad and are principally divided between the Hindu and Islamic religious groups, along with significant Presbyterian and some Catholic representation.

Ethnic and religious divisions are reflected in political life, with the governing People's National Movement (PNM) party drawing much of its support from Afro-Trinidadians and many Indo-Trinidadians supporting the main opposition party, the United National Congress (UNC), as well as the nonparliamentary opposition Congress of the People party. Religious overtones were sometimes present in the messages and ceremonies of the PNM and the UNC. All parties professed to focus on issues and embrace all potential voters without reference to race, creed, or ethnic origin.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Political leaders attended celebrations of all groups and often delivered speeches on the need to respect all religious traditions.

To receive tax-exempt donations or gifts of land, or to perform marriages, religious groups must register with the Government, which requires them to demonstrate that they are nonprofit organizations. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, regardless of whether they are registered. They can own land, but they must pay property taxes; they can hire employees, but they must pay government-mandated employee benefits. Some religious groups register their organizations for increased visibility and to attract wider membership.

The Government subsidizes both nondenominational public schools and religiously affiliated public schools (for example, Catholic, Hindu, and Islamic). The Government permits religious instruction in nondenominational public schools, allocating time each week when any religious organization with an adherent in the school can provide an instructor. Attendance at these classes is voluntary, and the religious groups represented are diverse. Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. Homeschooling is not allowed, since the

Education Act mandates formal schooling for all children either in public or private schools.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for ecclesiastical affairs and administers annual financial grants to religious organizations. It also issues recommendations on land use by such organizations.

The law prohibits acts that would offend or insult another person or group on the basis of race, origin, or religion; or which would incite racial or religious hatred. The law also provides for prosecution for the desecration of any place of worship. Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and do not publicly favor any religion. Judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination.

The Government established public holidays for every religious group with a large following. The Government observes the Christian holidays of Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas; the Hindu holiday of Divali; and the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr. In addition, the Government recognizes Liberation Day, which is associated with the Spiritual Baptist religion. The Government grants financial and technical assistance to various organizations to support religious celebrations.

A Hindu group that organizes the celebration of Phagwa (also known as Holi), a joyous celebration that marks the start of the Hindu New Year, complained about the level of government funding it received. The organization objected to the reduction of state funding from approximately \$12,500 (TT\$75,000) in 2007, to \$10,000 (TT\$60,000) in 2008, and finally to \$800 (TT\$5,000) in 2009. The group returned the 2009 grant in protest.

The Government does not formally sponsor programs that promote interfaith dialogue; however, it supports the activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO). This organization is an interfaith coordinating committee for public outreach, governmental and media relations, and policy implementation. It also provides the prayer leader for several official events, such as the opening of parliament and the annual court term. The IRO liaises with the Ministry of Social Development as well as the Ministry of Education. The bylaws of the IRO do not exclude any religious groups from membership. Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists did not participate for doctrinal reasons.

Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, and public figures represented every major religious group and denomination and the broad spectrum of religious beliefs in the country. They often participated in the ceremonies and holidays of other religions and actively advocated religious tolerance and harmony.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

In May 2009, students of a nondenominational public school in south Trinidad participated in a Hindu prayer service and planted symbolic flags on the school grounds appealing for success in their examinations. The Ministry of Education ordered school authorities to remove the flags. The Minister stated that the Ministry promoted acceptance of religious diversity and the right of individuals to worship freely, but that a nondenominational public school should maintain a neutral environment. The decision of the Ministry offended some students and teachers, who declared that they would boycott classes and stand guard around the symbolic prayer flags. The school principal eventually removed the flags. More than half of the student body of 1,500 is Hindu.

Foreign missionaries operated freely. The Government limited the number of foreign missionaries to 30 per religious group at any given time. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa and must represent a registered religious group. They may not remain for more than three years per visit but may reenter after a year's absence.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In August 2008, the Government changed the name of the country's highest award, formerly known as the Trinity Cross, to the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and

Tobago, in response to a 2006 ruling that the Trinity Cross was a Christian symbol not representative of a pluralistic society. Many non-Christian citizens were previously unable or unwilling to accept the prestigious award.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In January 2009 a Roman Catholic school principal suspended a seven-year-old girl due to her traditional Rastafarian hairstyle. The student's attorney argued the right to education was constitutional, and since the school received government funding, it could not deny her access based on her hairstyle. The student was allowed to return to school, provided that she kept her hair "neat and tidy."

On August 8, 2008, unidentified vandals broke into a prominent Hindu temple in Cunupia, a town in central Trinidad. The vandals defiled religious idols. There was a similar incident one year earlier at a different Hindu temple also in central Trinidad. The Government publicly denounced these acts of vandalism. Police made no arrests due to lack of evidence. The IRO believed the vandalism was part of an overall crime surge rather than religiously motivated.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials maintained contact with most religious organizations and invited representatives to official functions.

TUNISIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion unless they disturb the public order; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on this right. The Constitution stipulates the country's determination to adhere to the teachings of Islam, that Islam is the official state religion, and that the President is required to be a Muslim.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims; it also restricts the wearing of "sectarian dress," including the hijab (Islamic headscarf). Domestic and international human rights organizations reported instances of police harassment of women wearing the hijab and men with traditional Islamic dress and beards. The Government sponsored a number of conferences to promote religious tolerance during the reporting period.

Muslims who converted faced social ostracism. Middle and upper class secularists discouraged women from wearing the hijab. The press published some cartoons depicting derogatory caricatures of Jews to criticize Israel.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 63,170 square miles and a population of 10.5 million. The population is 99 percent Muslim and overwhelmingly Sunni. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include Shi'a Muslims, an indigenous "Maraboutic" Muslim community that belongs to spiritual brotherhoods known as "turuq," Baha'is, Jews, and Christians.

The Christian community, composed of foreign residents and a small group of native-born citizens of European or Arab descent, numbers approximately 25,000 and is dispersed throughout the country. There are an estimated 20,000 Roman Catholics, 500 of whom regularly practice. The Catholic Church operates 12 churches, nine schools, several libraries, and two clinics. There are approximately 2,000 practicing Protestant Christians, including a few hundred citizens who have converted to Christianity. The Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 100 practicing members and maintains churches in Tunis and Bizerte. The French

Reform Church maintains a church in Tunis, with a congregation estimated at 140 primarily foreign members. The Anglican Church has a church in Tunis with several hundred predominantly foreign members. There are approximately 50 Seventh-day Adventists. The Greek Orthodox Church has an estimated 30 members and maintains three churches (in Tunis, Sousse, and Djerba). There are also approximately 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, of whom half are foreign residents and half are native-born citizens.

Judaism is the country's third largest religion with 1,500 members. One-third of the Jewish population lives in and around the capital. The remainder lives on the island of Djerba, where the Jewish community dates back 2,500 years.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion unless they disturb the public order; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on this right. The Constitution stipulates the country's determination to adhere to the teachings of Islam, that Islam is the official state religion, and that the President is required to be a Muslim. The Government prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims and restricts the wearing of "sectarian dress," including the hijab (Islamic headscarf) by women and beards and the qamis (knee-length shirts) by men.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties based on religion, and it continued to ban the Islamist party An-Nahdha. The Government asserts that religious parties could be vehicles for extremism and that by preventing political parties from becoming channels for intolerance, hatred, and terrorism, it promotes societal tolerance. The Government maintains tight surveillance over Islamists and does not issue passports to some alleged Islamists. It maintains that only the courts possess the power to revoke passports; however, reports indicated that it rarely observed this separation of powers in politically sensitive cases.

Government decrees dating from 1981 and 1986 restrict the wearing of sectarian dress, generally interpreted to mean the hijab, in government offices and discourage women from wearing it on public streets and at certain public gatherings. In 2006 a lower court ruled that the 1986 decree was unconstitutional, but the ruling is not binding. The Government stated that the hijab is a sign of membership in a fundamentalist group that hides behind religion to achieve

political ends and that, according to the Modern Islamic school of thought, wearing the hijab is not an obligation. The Government describes the hijab as a sectarian garment of foreign origin and justifies its restriction of the hijab in public institutions as necessary to preserve the impartiality of officials.

No statutory prohibitions against conversion from Islam to another faith exist, and the Government does not require registration of conversion; however, government officials occasionally harass and discriminate against converts from Islam to another religion, using bureaucratic means to discourage conversion.

Efforts to proselytize Muslims are viewed as disturbing the public order and are thus illegal. Whereas the authorities previously deported non-Muslim foreigners suspected of proselytizing and did not permit them to return, recent reports indicate that the Government prefers to deny suspected missionaries visa renewal or to pressure their employers not to extend their contracts.

Applying customary law based on Shari'a, the Government forbids Muslim women from marrying outside their religion inside the country; however, the Government generally recognizes marriages of Muslim women to non-Muslim men performed abroad. On occasion, however, the Government does not recognize such marriages as legal, forcing the couple to seek a court ruling. If a man converts to Islam, he may marry a Muslim woman. Muslim men and non-Muslim women who are married cannot inherit from each other, and children from those marriages, all of whom the Government considers to be Muslim, cannot inherit from their mothers.

Generally, Shari'a-based interpretation of civil law is applied only in some family cases. Some families avoid the strictures of Shari'a on inheritance by executing sales contracts between parents and children to ensure that sons and daughters receive equal shares of property.

Civil law is codified; however, judges were known to override codified family or inheritance laws if their interpretation of Shari'a contradicted it. For example, codified laws provide women with custody over their minor children; however, when fathers contested cases, judges generally refused to grant women permission to leave the country with their children, maintaining that Shari'a appoints the father as the head of the family and as such he must grant permission for the children to travel.

The Government controls and subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of imams (clerics). The President appoints the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The 1988 Law

on Mosques stipulates that only personnel appointed by the Government may lead activities in mosques and that mosques must remain closed except during prayer times and authorized religious ceremonies, such as marriages or funerals.

However, several historically significant mosques are partially open to tourists and other visitors for a few hours per day, several days a week. New mosques may be built in accordance with national urban planning regulations; however, upon completion, they become the property of the Government. The authorities have reportedly informed imams that those who used mosques to "spread ideologies" would be prosecuted.

The Government recognizes all Christian and Jewish religious organizations that were established before independence in 1956. Although the Government permits Christian churches to operate freely as long as they do not proselytize, it has formally recognized only the Catholic Church, through a 1964 concordat with the Holy See. In addition to authorizing 14 churches "serving all sects" of the country, the Government recognizes land grants signed by the Bey of Tunis in the 18th and 19th centuries that allow other churches to operate. Occasionally, Catholic and Protestant religious groups hold services in private residences or other locations.

Religious groups are subject to the same restrictions on the freedoms of speech and the press as secular groups. There is no law requiring the Government to approve all locally produced printed material prior to publication or distribution. Christian groups, however, have reported that the Government generally does not grant permission to publish and distribute Arabic-language Christian texts. Christian groups report that they are able to distribute previously approved religious publications in European languages without difficulty but that the Government allows only established churches to distribute religious publications to parishioners. It considers other groups' distribution of religious documents to be a "threat to public order" and thus illegal.

The Government allows the Jewish community freedom of worship and pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi. It also provides security for all synagogues and partially subsidizes restoration and maintenance costs for some. Government employees were responsible for lawn upkeep of the Jewish cemetery in Tunis.

The Government permits the Jewish community to operate private religious schools and allows Jewish children on the island of Djerba to split their academic day between secular public schools and private religious schools. In June 2008 *Magharebia* reported that the government-run Essouani School was the only school where Jewish and Muslim students studied together. To accommodate

Jewish students, who consider Saturday to be holy, the school authorities determined that Muslim students would attend Islamic education lessons on Saturdays, while their Jewish classmates attended classes on religion at a Jewish school in Djerba. There is also a small private Jewish school in Tunis.

The Government regards the Baha'i faith as a heretical sect of Islam and permits its adherents to practice their faith only in private. The Government permits Baha'is to hold meetings of their national council in private homes, and three Local Spiritual Assemblies, the local governing body, have been elected since 2004.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools, but the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The Zeitouna Qur'anic School is part of the Government's national university system, which is otherwise secular.

Both religious and secular NGOs are governed by the same legal and administrative regulations that impose some restrictions on freedom of assembly. For example, all NGOs are required to notify the Government of meetings held in public spaces at least three days in advance and to submit lists of all meeting participants to the Ministry of Interior. The Government allows a small number of foreign religious charitable non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate and provide social services.

The Government observes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Since gaining independence in 1956, the Government has not permitted any Protestant Christian groups seeking legal status to establish new churches, so most Christian groups no longer attempt to apply for registration.

Although the Government has not granted the 1999 request of the Association of the Jewish Community of Tunis to be registered, the association's president and board of governors continued to meet weekly and performed religious activities and charity work unhindered. On April 2, 2007, the Governor of Medenine approved the request of a Jewish organization in Djerba for registration. The group performed religious activities and charitable work unobstructed both before and after receiving official approval.

There were reports of police requiring women to remove the veil in offices, on the street, at universities, and at some public gatherings; however, it was nonetheless common to see women wearing the hijab in a variety of public settings.

School officials took disciplinary action on several occasions to punish and deter wearing the hijab. On July 3, 2008, local NGOs reported that the administration of Lycee November 7 in Dar Chaabane El Fehri asked female students to remove their hijabs before receiving awards for their performance. According to a local NGO, on September 13, 2008, the head of the Superior Institute for Technological Studies in Sidi Bouzid asked female students wearing the hijab to sign statements saying that they would thereafter desist from wearing it, and acknowledging that they would be expelled if they violated the agreement. In May 2009, domestic NGOs reported that administrators of the Higher Institute of Biotechnology in Sfax suspended six female students on April 30 and made them sign a pledge to no longer wear the hijab.

There were also frequent reports that police harassed or detained men with beards and/or who wore traditional Islamic-style clothing. According to human rights lawyers, the Government regularly questioned and detained some Muslims who were observed praying frequently in mosques.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2007 and 2008, according to allegations of some human rights groups and defense lawyers, the Government arrested some men because of their Islamic appearance, their frequent attendance at mosques, or other actions related to their practice of Islam.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government promoted interfaith understanding by sponsoring regular conferences and seminars on religious tolerance. For example, on February 16-17,

2009, the Government hosted an international seminar to promote religious tolerance entitled "Religious Information and the Challenges During our Time."

The Government also facilitated and promoted the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer on May 11-12, 2009. According to press reports and eyewitnesses, approximately 6,000 Jews, most with ties to the country, traveled from abroad to participate in the pilgrimage. According to the Djerban Jewish community's president, attendance was the largest since al-Qa'ida attacked the synagogue in 2002, killing 21 persons. Local Jewish leaders stated that 20 to 25 percent of these pilgrims were Israeli citizens traveling under the relaxed travel policies that went into effect in 2004.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although religious conversion is legal, there is great societal pressure against the conversion of Muslims to other religious groups. Muslims who converted faced social ostracism.

Despite a history of middle and upper class secularists discouraging women from wearing the hijab, anecdotal evidence suggested that, for a variety of social and religious reasons, the number of young middle class urban women choosing to wear the hijab continued to rise during the reporting period.

Some cartoons depicted derogatory caricatures of Jews to portray Israel and Israeli interests. Cartoonists drew most of these cartoons outside of the country, and they were reprinted locally.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy maintains good relations with leaders of majority and minority religious groups throughout the country, and the U.S. ambassador and other embassy officials met regularly with government officials and Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders throughout the reporting period. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials visited the El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba during the annual Jewish pilgrimage celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer and met with local religious leaders. The Embassy fostered regular exchanges that included components designed to highlight U.S. traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism.

TURKEY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government continued to impose limitations on Islamic and other religious groups and significant restrictions on Islamic religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Islamic religious headscarves in government offices as well as public schools. The Government also continued to oppose "Islamic extremism." Religious minorities said they were effectively blocked from careers in state institutions because of their faith. Minority religious groups also faced difficulties in worshipping, registering with the Government, and training their followers. Although religious speech and persuasion is legal, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced some restrictions and occasional harassment for alleged proselytizing.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Threats against non-Muslims created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Many Christians, Baha'is, and heterodox Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and some elements of society continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and state institutions as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, embassy and consulate representatives met frequently with government officials and representatives of religious groups to discuss matters related to religious freedom, including legal reform aimed at lifting restrictions on religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 301,383 square miles and a population of 70.5 million. According to the Government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which is Hanafi Sunni. According to the human rights nongovernmental organization Mazlum-Der and representatives of various religious minority communities, the actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower.

In addition to the Sunni Muslim majority, academics estimate that there are between 10 million and 20 million Alevi, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religious groups indigenous to Anatolia. The Government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; some Alevi and Sunni maintain that Alevi are not Muslims.

There are several other religious groups, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these religious groups include approximately 500,000 Shiite Caferis, 65,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 23,000 Jews, 15,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians, 10,000 Baha'is, 5,000 Yezidis, 3,300 Jehovah's Witnesses, 3,000 members of various other Protestant sects, and up to 3,000 Greek Orthodox Christians. There are also small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian, Nestorian, Georgian, Roman Catholic, and Maronite Christians. Among these minority religious communities are a significant number of Iraqi refugees, including 3,000 Chaldean Christians.

The number of Syriac Christians in the southeast was higher before 1990; however, under pressure from government authorities and later under the impact of the war against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), many Syriacs migrated to Istanbul, western and northern Europe, or North and South America. Over the last several years, small numbers of Syriacs returned from overseas to the southeast, mostly from Europe. In most cases, older family members returned while younger ones remained abroad.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The 1982 Constitution establishes the country as a secular state and

provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds.

Core institutions of the state, including the presidency, armed forces, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, have played the role, implied in the Constitution, of defending the country's tradition of secularism throughout the history of the republic. In some cases, elements of the state have opposed activities of the elected government on grounds that they threatened the secular state (see Restrictions).

Article 219 of the Penal Code prohibits imams, priests, rabbis, or other religious leaders from "reproaching or vilifying" the Government or the laws of the state while performing their duties. Violations are punishable by prison terms of one month to one year, or three months to two years if the crime involves inciting others to disobey the law.

There are legal restrictions against insulting a government-recognized religion, interfering with such a religious group's services, or defacing its property.

The Government observes the religious holidays/periods of Ramazan Bayram and Kurban Bayram as national holidays.

The Government does not recognize conscientious objection to military service, and those who oppose military service on religious grounds face charges in civil court and prison time.

Registration with the government is not mandatory for religious groups; however, unregistered religious groups have no legal standing and can face greater harassment. Any organization, including a religious group, has the opportunity to register as an association or a foundation but not on religious grounds.

While both foundations and associations receive equal protection by law, associations must be nonprofit by definition and can receive money only in the form of donations. A foundation has greater fiscal freedom and can earn income through companies to support the foundation. However, the process for becoming a foundation is substantially lengthier and more expensive. Parliament determines on an annual basis the minimum capital requirement for creating a foundation; in 2009 the minimum was set at approximately \$33,300 (50,000 lira).

There are several official categories of foundations, including minority community foundations, education foundations, and aid foundations. Since 1936, religious

groups cannot register as minority community foundations and gain the legal rights held by such foundations. There are 161 religious community foundations that existed during the Ottoman Empire that were grandfathered into the foundation system. New religious groups can apply to register as a "new foundation" (aid or education, for example). To begin the process, applicants must pay a sum, determined by the General Directorate of Foundations (GDF), correspondent to the extent of the foundation's charter. Applicants cannot limit the focus of their activities to one community, e.g., Christians. Religious community foundations are the only religious groups that can own real estate. A foundation of any category can be closed only by a court judgment, which provides some protection for religious community groups who are registered in this way. The foundations law also requires that a Turkish citizen be the administrative leader of any foundation.

For religious communities, becoming an association can take as few as three months with no capital requirement. A group must submit a registration application to the provincial governor's office to become an association and can immediately begin operating while waiting for confirmation from the association decision committee of the governor's office that its bylaws are constitutional. However, an association can also be closed by the provincial governor's office and has fewer legal protections on the local level. Associations are bound by the Civil Code to not discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, or race. As a result, associations focused on support for one religious group are not permitted.

The GDF regulates activities of all religious groups and their affiliated property. The GDF recognizes 161 "minority community foundations," including Greek Orthodox foundations with approximately 74 sites, Armenian Orthodox foundations with an estimated 48 sites, and Jewish foundations with 12 sites, as well as Syriac Christian, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The GDF also regulates all charitable religious foundations, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The GDF assesses whether the foundations are operating within the stated objectives of their organizational statute.

In addition, the Government oversees Muslim religious facilities and courses through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which is under the authority of the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet is responsible for regulating the operation of the more than 77,500 registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants.

The Constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in public primary and secondary schools, with content determined by the Minister of National Education's Department of Religious Instruction. Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish religious groups may operate schools under the supervision of the Education Ministry. The curriculums of these schools include information unique to the cultures of the three groups. The Ministry reportedly verifies if the child's father or mother is from that minority community before the child may enroll. Other non-Muslim minorities do not have schools of their own.

Article 24 of the Constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to reveal his or her religious beliefs. Although religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards, citizens can choose not to include a religion on their identity cards.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government continued to impose limitations on Muslim and other religious groups and significant restrictions on individuals' Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state."

On July 30, 2008, in a suit brought against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) by the Chief Prosecutor in March 2008, the Constitutional Court found the AKP guilty of serving as a center for antiseccularist activities in violation of the Constitution. Six judges voted to ban the party; however, the Constitution requires that at least seven judges vote in favor of banning for a party to be closed. The 11-member court instead agreed to halve the party's state funding.

Some members of the military, judiciary, and other branches of the bureaucracy continued to wage campaigns against what they label as Islamic fundamentalism. These groups view religious fundamentalism as a threat to the secular state. The National Security Council and Turkish General Staff categorize religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety. According to Turkish human rights organization Mazlum-Der and other groups, a few government ministries dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of antistate or Islamist activities. Reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicated that the military periodically dismissed religiously observant Muslims from military service. Such dismissals were based on behavior that military officials believed identified these individuals as Islamic fundamentalists, which officials believed

could indicate disloyalty to the secular state. There also were reports of non-Muslim religious leaders being identified and portrayed as threats to national security during military training.

According to Mazlum-Der, the military charged soldiers with lack of discipline for activities that included performing Islamic prayers or being married to women who wore headscarves. According to the military, officers and noncommissioned officers were dismissed periodically for ignoring repeated warnings from superior officers and for maintaining ties to what the military considered Islamic fundamentalist organizations. In August 2008 the Government reported no military dismissals, while in its December 2008 session it issued 24 dismissals, five of which pertained to alleged Islamic fundamentalism.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats), banned officially since the mid-1920s, remained active and widespread. Some prominent political and social leaders continued to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Islamic organizations.

Three applications on the issue of conscientious objection were pending with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) at the end of the reporting period.

The Government interprets the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to three recognized groups--Armenian Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians--although the treaty text refers broadly to "non-Muslim minorities" without listing specific groups. This recognition does not extend to the religious leadership organs. The Armenian and Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Patriarchates continued to seek legal recognition of their status as patriarchates rather than foundations, the absence of which prevents them from having the right to own and transfer property. Additionally, because the Government requires all places of learning to be under the control of the Education Ministry, the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox chose not to train their ministry in the country.

In 1974 the High Court of Appeals ruled that minority foundations had no right to acquire properties beyond those listed in their 1936 declarations, and the state seized control of properties acquired after 1936. An amended foundations law governing religious minority property rights, which became effective in February 2008, facilitates the return of minority foundation properties expropriated as a result of the 1974 ruling; however, the law does not account for properties that have been sold to third parties or to those expropriated when the associated

foundations have been taken under government control, which, due to the Greek community's small population, applies to the majority of expropriated Greek Orthodox properties. The law also does not rescind the authority of the GDF to expropriate property. Officials claimed that the amended foundations law should make it easier for non-Muslim communities to manage and establish new foundations. The opposition Republican People's Party's March 2008 appeal of nine articles of the law had not been taken up by the Constitutional Court by the end of the reporting period.

The amended law allows the 161 religious minority foundations recognized by the GDF to acquire property, but it does not allow the communities to reclaim the hundreds of properties affiliated with foundations expropriated by the state over the years. The GDF reported that after the foundations law went into effect in February 2008, based on provisional Article 7, a total of 18 foundations applied to register 152 pieces of real estate by May 2009. The application window was to remain open until August 2009.

Non-Muslim minorities complained that the implementing regulations of the foundations law has led to interference in the elections of foundation boards, the treatment of charitable community foundations as business corporations for tax purposes, the freezing of revenue from real estate transactions, and a ban on transferring surplus income from one foundation to another. Groups are disallowed from using funds from foundation properties in one part of the country to support foundations in other areas. However, according to the amended law, religious community foundations can receive financial grants from individuals and institutions domestically or internationally and can provide such grants to similar foundations and associations either in or outside the country.

In February 2009 the ECHR ruled in a case filed in 2008 that a Protestant church in Izmir had the right to legal status as an association; the Government complied with the ruling. Another case filed at the same time by a member of the Protestant group Alliance of Turkey, involving a complaint regarding the zoning of property as a place of worship, was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In September 2008 Yeni Dogus Church in Manisa was ordered by the governorship to halt its allegedly illegal activities. The group subsequently registered as an association and was not closed by the governorship.

Religious minorities reported difficulties opening, maintaining, and operating houses of worship. Under the law, religious services may take place only in

designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandate that only the Government can designate a place of worship, and if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it may not be eligible for a designated site. Non-Muslim religious services, especially for religious groups that did not own property recognized by the GDF, often took place on diplomatic property or in private apartments.

In early 2009 court decisions based on zoning laws against the use of two Jehovah's Witnesses places of worship (kingdom halls) were rescinded in the appeals process. Two other kingdom halls continued to appeal court decisions restricting worship due to zoning laws.

Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and built "cem" houses (places of gathering), although these have no legal status as places of worship and are often referred to as "cultural centers." Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained that they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish cem houses. They said there were approximately one hundred cem houses in the country, a number that they claimed was insufficient to meet their needs. Alevis also charged there was bias in the Diyanet, which did not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. In effect, the Diyanet budget is reserved for the Sunni community, covering the salaries of imams and other costs. The Government does not pay for the cost of utilities of cem houses or facilities not recognized by the Government as places of worship. However, two municipalities ruled that Alevi cem houses are considered places of worship, a legal classification that requires the local government to pay their utilities. On September 3, 2008, the Kusadasi municipal assembly voted unanimously to consider a cem house as a place of worship. In October 2008 the Tunceli municipal assembly voted unanimously to provide this status to cem houses in the province. Both assemblies included members from major parties, who voted also to cover the utilities of the cem houses, as the Diyanet does for mosques, as part of efforts to improve relations with the Alevi community.

Authorities continued to monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches but generally did not interfere with their religious activities; however, significant restrictions were placed on the administration of the churches. The Government does not recognize the ecumenical status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as the head of the country's Greek Orthodox community. Government officials privately acknowledged that the 1923 Lausanne Treaty does not address the issue of the Patriarch's status, and in a January 2008 speech to Parliament, Prime Minister Erdogan reportedly stated that "ecumenicity" was for the Church to address and not an issue in which the state should interfere.

The Caferis, the country's principal Shi'a community of Azeri-Iranian origin and concentrated mostly in the east and in Istanbul, did not face restrictions on their religious freedoms. They could build and operate their own mosques and appoint their own imams, but as with the Alevis, their places of worship had no legal status and received no financial support from the Diyanet.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul continued to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary was closed in 1971 after the Patriarchate, to avoid the seminary being administered by the state, chose not to comply with a state requirement to nationalize.

The state provides training for Sunni Islamic clergy; religious communities outside the Sunni Islamic mainstream cannot legally train new clergy in the country for eventual leadership. Coreligionists from outside the country were permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including patriarchs and chief rabbis, must be citizens.

The law makes eight years of secular education compulsory, after which students may pursue study at imam hatip (Islamic preacher) high schools, which cover both the standard high school curriculum and Islamic theology and practice. Imam hatip schools are classified as vocational, and graduates of vocational schools face an automatic reduction in their university entrance exam scores if they apply for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction effectively bars most imam hatip graduates from enrolling in university programs other than theology. Many pious citizens criticized the religious instruction provided in the regular schools as inadequate. Most families who enrolled their children in imam hatip schools did so to expose them to more extensive religious education rather than to train them as imams.

Religious minorities are exempted legally from compulsory religious and moral instruction in primary and secondary schools. The Government claimed that the compulsory instruction covers the range of world religions, but religious minorities asserted that the courses reflect Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine and that antimissionary rhetoric remained in compulsory school textbooks. A few religious minorities, such as Protestants and Syriac Orthodox, faced difficulty obtaining exemptions, particularly if their identification cards did not list a religion other than Islam.

Alevi children receive the same compulsory religious education as all Muslims, and many Alevis alleged discrimination in the Government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. During the reporting period, Alevis had nearly 20 court cases against the Ministry of Education regarding alleged discrimination. Materials for the proposed new religious course curriculum that includes instruction on Alevism were believed by many Alevis to be inadequate and, in some cases, false.

Only the Diyanet is authorized to provide religion courses outside of school, although clandestine private courses existed. Students who complete the first five years of primary school and are more than 12 years old may enroll in Diyanet Qur'an classes on weekends and during summer vacation, although many other Qur'an courses functioned unofficially. Mazlum-Der reported that law enforcement authorities often raided illegal courses for younger children.

The Government long has maintained that only Turkish citizens can be members of the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Synod and participate in patriarchal elections, despite the Ecumenical Patriarch's appeal to allow non-Turkish prelates. Members of the Greek Orthodox community claimed that the legal restrictions particularly threatened the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, because with no more than 3,000 Greek Orthodox remaining in the country, the community was becoming too small to provide enough citizen prelate candidates to maintain the institution. The Government, however, did not formally respond to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I's 2004 appointment of six noncitizen metropolitans to the Holy Synod, representing the first appointment of noncitizens to the body in the 80-year history of the country.

Religious groups generally faced administrative challenges when employing foreign religious personnel, as did other entities when employing foreign personnel. These administrative challenges, plus restrictions on training religious leaders and difficulties obtaining visas, have led to decreases in the number of recognized Christian communities. In December 2008, however, the Government provided year-long work permits to non-Turkish clerics working at the Ecumenical Greek Patriarchate. Noncitizen clerics had previously used tourist visas, requiring them to depart the country every three months.

During the Malatya trial hearings (see Section III), retired general Veli Kucuk testified that Christian missionary and Islamic extremist activities were treated the same by state institutions, and Jandarma intelligence official Erkan Yilmaz confirmed that the Jandarma equates missionary activities with terrorism.

No law explicitly prohibits religious speech or religious conversions; nevertheless, many prosecutors and police regarded religious speech and religious activism with suspicion. Christians engaged in religious advocacy were occasionally threatened or pressured by government and state officials. If the advocates were foreigners, they were at times deported, but generally they were able to reenter the country. In April 2009 at least two foreign Christian families in Izmit volunteering with a church reportedly left the country under pressure from the Ministry of Interior for not obtaining the "proper permits." Police officers occasionally reported students who met with Christian missionaries to their families or to university authorities.

Authorities continued to enforce the long-standing ban on the wearing of headscarves by civil servants in public buildings and by students in universities. Women who wear headscarves and persons who actively show support for those who defy the ban have been disciplined or have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers. At the same time, there were unconfirmed reports that employees in governmental ministries faced discrimination because they were not considered by their supervisors to be sufficiently observant of Islamic religious practices.

A few religious groups, such as the Baha'i, were unable to state their religious affiliation on their national identity cards because their religion was not included among the options. Despite a 2006 regulation allowing persons to leave the religion section of their identity cards blank or change the religious designation by written application, the Government continued to restrict applicants' choice of religion. Applicants must choose Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Religionless, Other, or Unknown as their religious affiliation.

There were reports that local officials harassed persons who converted from Islam to another religion when they sought to amend their cards. Some non-Muslims maintained that listing religious affiliation on the cards exposed them to discrimination and harassment.

Restoration or construction may be carried out on buildings and monuments considered "ancient" only with authorization of the regional board on the protection of cultural and national wealth. Bureaucratic procedures and considerations relating to historic preservation in the past impeded repairs to religious facilities, especially in the case of Syriac and Armenian Orthodox properties.

In August 2008 three muhtars (the lowest level of nonpartisan elected official with limited authority) in Midyat filed a criminal complaint with a local prosecutor against the Syriac Mor Gabriel Monastery, alleging it illegally appropriated territory by building a wall. On May 22, 2009, a local court ruled in favor of the monastery regarding the claims of three local villages. The Department of Forestry and Department of Treasury filed separate cases, accusing the monastery of occupying government-owned forest land and Treasury Department land. Official photographs from the 1950s documented the provincial administrative board's approval of the monastery's borders. The monastery does not have legal status and is represented by a foundation established during the Ottoman Empire. The five local court cases related to forest lands and Treasury Department lands continued at the end of the reporting period.

On July 8, 2008, the ECHR ruled that the country had violated the Ecumenical Patriarchate's property rights to a former orphanage on Buyukada Island. The ECHR process for determining whether the Patriarchate would receive monetary compensation or the return of the land continued at the end of the reporting period.

Minority religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, lost numerous properties to the state in the past and continued to fight ongoing efforts by the state to expropriate properties. In many cases the Government had taken control of minority foundations and expropriated associated properties on the grounds that the foundations were not operating in accordance with their charters or that the non-Muslim communities they supported had insufficient populations to sustain the foundations. Such expropriations were frequently appealed to the Danistay (Council of State) and, if unsuccessful there, to the ECHR. Many religious minorities experienced problems operating places of worship due to laws governing foundations.

On December 16, 2008, the ECHR issued judgments against the Government for violating the property rights of two Armenian foundations--the Samatya Surp Kevork Armenian Church, School, and Cemetery Foundation and the Yedikule Surp Pirgic Armenian Hospital Foundation--in cases pertaining to properties they formerly owned.

The Buyukada Court of First Instance was reviewing the Greek Orthodox Church's complaint that in November 2007 Ministry of Environment and Forestry officials damaged a building on the compound of a Greek Orthodox church on Heybeli Island while it was being restored. The Church faced a separate case brought by

the Ministry for conducting restoration without written permission; the case continued at the end of the reporting period.

Syriac residents of Bardakci village who fled in the mid-1980s found upon their return after 2005 that one of the village's two Syriac churches had been converted into a mosque without the Syriac community having been consulted. By mid-2009 construction of a new mosque was underway, and local government authorities assured Syriac leaders that as soon as the new mosque was completed, the converted church would be returned to the Syriac community as a place of worship. Some returning Syriacs claimed that government authorities reclassified properties while the Syriacs were out of the country in ways that caused them to lose some of their land.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On December 12, 2008, police in Rize detained several South Africans and charged them with missionary activities. The prosecutor released them without charge.

Due to the Jehovah's Witnesses' stance as conscientious objectors to military service, members continued to face difficulties. According to Jehovah's Witnesses officials, at the end of the reporting period, two members remained in prison for conscientious objection. One of the objectors, Baris Gormez, had been charged six times for "disobedience of orders" and had been in prison since 2007.

In November 2008 a court convicted four suspects, including one village guard, to a total of 60 years' imprisonment for the November 2007 kidnapping of Syriac priest Edip Daniel Savci in Midyat. Three other suspects were acquitted.

On May 28, 2009, court proceedings continued in the 2006 case against two Muslim converts to Christianity charged with "insulting Turkishness," in violation of Article 301 of the Penal Code, inciting hatred against Islam, and secretly compiling data on private citizens for a Bible correspondence course. The court called five witnesses to appear at the next hearing, set for October 15, 2009.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Threats against non-Muslims during the reporting period created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Religious pluralism was widely viewed as a threat to Islam and to "national unity." Muslims, Christians, Jews, Baha'is, and members of other religious communities faced societal suspicion and mistrust.

The trial of five suspects involved in the 2007 alleged torture and killing of three members of a Protestant church in Malatya continued at the close of the reporting period. In May 2009 Emre Gunaydin continued to deny accusations made by the other suspects that he was the leader in the attacks. There were allegations that local political officers, members of the special military forces, and regional members of the country's nationalist political party were involved, which authorities denied. However, in December 2007 the Interior Ministry also opened a judicial investigation into the alleged collusion of public officials in these murders. Prosecuting lawyers requested that the case be tied to the Ergenekon indictment, in which 86 persons were indicted for planning to incite a revolt against the Government.

In May 2009 one of the attorneys representing the families of the Malatya victims reported that while threats against him continued, the level had diminished significantly.

On December 29, 2008, an Izmir court sentenced Ramazan Bay, who injured priest Adriano Francini in December 2007 in Izmir, to five years' imprisonment but later reduced it to four years and two months for good behavior. The court also sentenced Bay to an extra five months and a fine of \$250 (375 lira) for carrying a switchblade.

In March 2009 unknown individuals broke into the Kadikoy International Church but did not cause damage. Police led a brief investigation with no findings.

In the first half of 2009, two Greek Orthodox cemeteries in Istanbul and one in Izmir suffered extensive damage due to vandalism. On June 29, officials from the Greek Embassy estimated that nearly 60 percent of Istanbul's Edirnekapi cemetery was destroyed. In March 2009 national police were assigned to protect a cemetery

in Balikli, Istanbul, after some reported incidents of vandalism in February. No additional incidents in Balikli were reported by the end of the reporting period.

Jews and Christians from most denominations freely practiced their religions and reported little discrimination in daily life; however, citizens who converted from Islam to another religion often experienced some form of social harassment or pressure from family and neighbors. Proselytizing on behalf of non-Muslim religious groups was socially unacceptable and sometimes dangerous.

Nationalist sentiments sometimes contained anti-Christian or anti-Semitic overtones. Jewish community members reported that the significant rise of anti-Semitism that began in the summer of 2006 continued through the reporting period. Boycotts of Jewish businesses and government-sponsored events following the Israeli offensive in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 heightened anti-Semitic sentiments, according to the community leaders. Some businesses in Eskisehir posted notices to prevent "Jews, Armenians, and dogs" from entering. Jewish leaders in the country believed the anti-Semitism was directly related to events in the Middle East, and Jewish community members reported that they were held responsible for these events.

In December 2008 the leader of the Yalova Christian community filed a complaint with the Yalova Security Directorate when posters advertising a conference to be held by a radical nationalist youth group at the provincial Public Training Centre were found depicting Christians as snakes wearing crosses. Upon investigation the police found the posters to be displayed without permission, and police and municipal officials removed some. The conference, however, retained permission to be held in the public venue.

Six Protestant pastors, some church legal advisors, and several churches across the country receive heightened police protection due to threats.

In contrast with the previous reporting period, there were no attacks or death threats against Radio Shema, a Christian radio station in Ankara.

Members of the secular establishment and other groups feared the influence of Islamism and rejected the involvement of Islam in politics.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and state institutions as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other diplomatic officials, including staff of the consulate general in Istanbul and the consulate in Adana, maintained close relations with the Muslim majority and other religious groups. The Ambassador and other officials also continued to urge the Government to permit the reopening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island.

On April 6, 2009, President Obama addressed Parliament and emphasized the U.S. interest in seeing Halki seminary reopened in recognition of the importance of religious freedom. On April 7, President Obama met with leaders of religious communities, including the Ecumenical Patriarch, Chief Rabbi, Armenian Archbishop, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan, and Mufti of Istanbul.

The Ambassador regularly discussed government policy regarding Islam and other religious groups as well as specific cases of religious discrimination and other topics concerning religious freedom in private meetings with cabinet members. The Ambassador met with Diyanet President Ali Bardakoglu on January 8, 2009, to discuss the work of the Diyanet. Other embassy and consulate officers held similar meetings with government officials. Diplomats from the Embassy and consulates met regularly with representatives of various religious groups. These meetings covered a range of topics, including problems faced by non-Muslim groups and the debate over the role of Islam in the country.

The consulate general in Istanbul provided security training for minority religious communities as a part of its overall security strategy.

TURKMENISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to restrict the free practice of religion. All groups must register in order to gain legal status; unregistered religious activity is illegal and may be punished by administrative fines.

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom, but there were small improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Nevertheless, as in the previous reporting period, troubling government practices in the treatment of some registered and unregistered groups continued. During the reporting period, government promotion of the *Ruhnama*, the former President Niyazov's spiritual-social book, continued to decrease, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief carried out a mission. Several religious groups remained unable to register, however, and the Government restricted registered groups' ability to own property, print or import religious materials, host foreign guests, and proselytize. There were reports of raids and arbitrary detentions involving Jehovah's Witnesses. The Government also continued to arrest, charge, and imprison Jehovah's Witnesses who conscientiously objected to military service.

There were no reports of societal abuses or violence based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The Government, through its Council on Religious Affairs (CRA), did little to promote interfaith understanding or dialogue beyond that between Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians. The majority of citizens identify themselves as Sunni Muslim; ethnic Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Turkmen society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs, but ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert to other religious groups, especially lesser-known Protestant groups, are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, U.S. embassy representatives and visiting U.S. Department of State officials raised religious freedom concerns in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The Embassy hosted two roundtables for registered and unregistered minority religious groups during the reporting period.

At the request of the Government, the U.S. government funded an independent analysis of the 2003 law on religion.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 188,457 square miles and a population of five million. Statistics regarding religious affiliation were not available. According to the Government's most recent census (1995), ethnic Turkmen constitute 77 percent of the population. Minority ethnic populations include Uzbeks (9.2 percent), Russians (6.7 percent), and Kazakhs (2 percent). Armenians, Azeris, and other ethnic groups constitute the remaining 5.1 percent. The majority religion is Sunni Islam, and Russian Orthodox Christians constitute the largest religious minority. The level of active religious observance is unknown.

Since independence there has been a tightly controlled revival of Islam. During the Soviet era, there were only four mosques operating; at the end of the reporting period, there were 398, according to the CRA. Ethnic Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Baloch living in Mary Province are predominantly Sunni Muslim. There are small pockets of Shi'a Muslims, many of whom are ethnic Iranians, Azeris, or Kurds living along the border with Iran and in Turkmenbashi.

As a result of restrictive government control, indigenous Islamic culture, and 70 years of Soviet rule, traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Local interpretations of Islam place a heavy premium on rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death, featuring music and dancing that more traditional Muslims view as unorthodox. Together with shrine pilgrimage, such rituals play a greater role in local Muslims' expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

The 1995 census indicated that ethnic Russians made up almost 7 percent of the population; however, subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere continues to reduce this proportion. Most ethnic Russians and Armenians are Christian. Russian practicing Christians are generally members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). There are 13 Russian Orthodox churches, three of which are in Ashgabat. A priest resident in Ashgabat leads the ROC within the country. In October 2007 the Government began negotiations to have the religious jurisdiction of the ROC in Turkmenistan shifted from the Central Asian ROC Diocese in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and placed under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. In May 2008, subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate became

official as a result of a meeting between President Berdimuhamedov and ROC officials. There is one convent in Ashgabat but no Russian Orthodox seminary.

Ethnic Russians and Armenians comprise a significant percentage of members of unregistered religious congregations; ethnic Turkmen are increasingly represented among these groups as well. There are small communities of the following unregistered religious groups: the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Shi'a Muslims, and several evangelical Christian groups including Baptists, charismatic groups, Pentecostals, and an unaffiliated nondenominational group.

A small community of ethnic Germans, most of whom live in and around the city of Saragt, reportedly includes practicing Lutherans. Approximately 1,000 ethnic Poles live in the country; they have been largely absorbed into the Russian community and consider themselves Russian Orthodox. The Catholic community in Ashgabat, which includes both citizens and foreigners, meets in the chapel of the Vatican Nunciature.

An estimated 1,000 Jews live in the country. Most are members of families who came from Ukraine during World War II. There are some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who are known as Bukharan Jews, referring to the Uzbek city of Bukhara. There are no synagogues or rabbis, and Jews continue to emigrate to Israel, Russia, and Germany; however, the Jewish population remains relatively constant. The community gathers for religious observances but does not wish to register as a religious group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to restrict the free practice of religion. All groups must register to gain legal status; unregistered religious activity is illegal and may be punished by administrative fines.

The Criminal Code outlaws violations of religious freedom or persecution by private actors; in practice it is not enforced. Throughout 2004, the Government issued a series of amendments to the 2003 law on religion, which replaced the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and its subsequent amendments in 1995 and 1996. The 2003 law on religion required all religious organizations to register, made operation of unregistered religious

organizations a criminal offense, restricted religious education, and monitored financial and material assistance to religious groups from foreign sources.

In January 2004, former President Niyazov signed a decree amending the 2003 law on religion by increasing registration fees for religious organizations to approximately \$178 (2.5 million manat). In addition, the decree relieved the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) of the obligation to publish in the local media a list of registered religious organizations. Without a published list, legally registered groups were more isolated, and the public was less able to respond when authorities harassed registered groups. The law also gave the MOJ the right to cancel a group's registration based on vaguely defined charges.

In March 2004, the Government published amendments to the 2003 law on religion that reduced numerical thresholds for registration from 500 members to five and made all minority groups eligible to register. The amendments established two legal categories for religious communities: religious groups (comprising at least five and fewer than 50 members of legal age) and religious organizations (comprising at least 50 members). The amendments leave significant gray areas in the law that permit the Government to delay registration.

Later in March 2004, the Government adopted but did not publish an implementing regulation and recommended standard charter that stipulated harsh requirements for religious groups wishing to register. The decree imposed financial and travel restrictions on registered religious organizations.

In response to international pressure, a May 2004 presidential decree publicly disavowed the unpublished March regulations and lifted criminal penalties for unregistered religious practice. The remaining civil law continues to allow the Government to control religious life and to restrict the activities of all religious groups.

Until June 2004, government entities at all levels, including the courts, had interpreted the laws in such a way as to discriminate against those practicing any faith other than Sunni Islam or Russian Orthodox Christianity, whose congregations represented the only two registered religious groups. In the year following the March 2004 decree reducing the numerical requirement for registration, nine religious groups registered: the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Turkmenistan, Seventh-day Adventist Church of Turkmenistan, Baha'i Community of Turkmenistan, Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas), Full Gospel Christian Church of Turkmenistan (Pentecostals), Light of the East

Church (Dashoguz Pentecostal Church), Greater Grace Church of Turkmenistan, International Church of Christ, and the New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan. The Ashgabat parish of the Russian Orthodox Church was reregistered in 2005, and the Turkmenabat parish reregistered in January 2006. The Source of Life Church in Turkmenabat and a Muslim group in Ahal were registered in late 2007.

Shi'a Muslim groups have been allowed to register collectively as an organization, according to the CRA. Deputy CRA Chairman Gurbanov stated that the Shi'a are registered as one organization but did not say when the Shi'a were registered.

In October 2005 the Government announced a temporary procedure for the registration of religious groups' regional branches by issuing powers of attorney. MOJ representatives also stated that amendments would be made to the 2003 law on religion that would codify the branch registration issue, but this did not occur during the reporting period.

There were indications the Government planned to modify previous policies regarding religious freedom through the further revision of the 2003 Law on Religion, but the law was not revised during the reporting period. At the request of the Government, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) funded by the United States Government prepared an analysis of the 2003 Law on Religion, which it delivered in July 2008. This analysis was one element of an ongoing project involving the Government and the NGO to revise the current religion law.

The government-appointed CRA reports to the president and ostensibly acts as an intermediary between the government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations. It includes Sunni Muslim imams and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as government representatives, but no representatives of minority religious groups. In practice the CRA acts as an arm of the state, exercising direct control over the hiring, promotion, and firing of Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox clergy, as well as playing a role in controlling all religious publications and activities. Its writ is enforced by security forces, specifically the Sixth Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and it has no role promoting interfaith dialogue, beyond that between Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians.

Although the Government does not officially favor any religion, it has provided financial and other support to the CRA for construction of new mosques. The Government also pays most Muslim clerics' salaries, approves all senior cleric appointments, and requires senior clerics to report regularly to the CRA.

Registered as well as unregistered minority religious communities had trouble obtaining facilities to use for worship. Legal and governmental obstacles hindered or prevented some religious groups from purchasing or obtaining long-term leases for land or buildings for worship or meetings. Some groups reported they were able to rent space for meetings only from private landlords because government-owned buildings were not available. Registered and unregistered groups also experienced difficulty in using residential property for worship or study. Although there are no laws that expressly prohibit holding religious services in residential property, Article 7 of the housing code states communal housing should not be used for any activities other than living. The code does not address the issue of using residential property for religious gatherings. Government officials stated that groups are permitted to hold services in private homes as long as the neighbors do not complain. Government policies, however, including those at the city level, such as zoning regulations on the use of private residences, have created difficulties for some groups seeking places to hold worship services. Three registered religious groups--the Baha'i community, the Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church--were permitted to conduct worship meetings in residential buildings, but local authorities told other groups, such as the unregistered Word of Life Church in Turkmenbashi, that they were breaking the law. The 2003 law on religion does not address the legality of holding religious activities in localities other than where a group is registered.

Unregistered religious groups and unregistered branches of religious groups are forbidden to conduct religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials, and proselytizing. Government authorities at times disrupted meetings of unregistered religious groups. Participants in those groups are subject to fines and administrative (not criminal) penalties under the administrative code. In practice, if they are suspected of unauthorized unregistered activity, they may also be subjected to search, detention, confiscation of religious materials, verbal abuse, pressure to confess to holding an illegal meeting, and beating.

The law prohibits foreign missionary activity and foreign religious organizations. The Government denies visas to foreigners suspected of conducting or intending to conduct missionary activity. The law does not restrict the ability of foreigners to worship with Turkmen religious groups.

By decree, publishing religious literature is prohibited, and the CRA must approve imported religious literature. Only registered religious groups can import literature. When the CRA approves the importation of a publication, the number of

imported copies cannot exceed the number of registered group members. A survey of state bookstores in Ashgabat revealed that the Qur'an was practically unavailable, except rare second-hand copies. Nevertheless, most homes have one copy in Arabic. Few are available in the Turkmen language. Only religious leaders may wear religious garb publicly.

The Government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition in its effort to redefine a national identity. For example, the Government built large, monumental mosques in Ashgabat, Gokdepe, Gypjak, and Mary, and planned to build another at Konye-Urgench. Despite its embrace of certain aspects of Islamic culture, the Government is concerned about foreign Islamic influence and the interpretation of Islam by local believers. The Government promotes a moderate understanding of Islam based on Turkmen religious and national traditions.

The role of the *Ruhnama*, former President Niyazov's spiritual-social book, continued to decline to the point where government policy can no longer be viewed as promoting the book.

Mosques and Muslim clergy are state-sponsored and financed. The Russian Orthodox Church and other religious groups are independently financed. The Government observes the following Sunni Muslim religious holidays as national holidays: Oraza-Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), commemorating the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, and Gurban Bairam (Eid al-Adha), a three-day holiday commemorating the end of the Hajj.

The Government does not offer alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors, although the law allowed it until 1995. The penalty for refusing to serve in the armed forces under Article 219, Part 1, of the Criminal Code is up to two years' imprisonment. Individuals who refuse military service for religious reasons are offered noncombatant roles within the military but are not provided with nonmilitary service alternatives. Until June 2007 conscripted members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were returned home unharmed several days after being called up, although they were not given papers excusing them from military service, which are needed for employment. This policy changed in June 2007, however, when three Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested and charged with avoiding military service. They were subsequently pardoned or given suspended sentences. Two Jehovah's Witnesses tried in November 2008 received suspended sentences. They were again tried in May 2009 and imprisoned for refusal of military service. Following separate trials in April 2009, two other Jehovah's Witnesses remained free with suspended sentences that required weekly reporting to local police.

Although some independent religious education exists, the Government did not promote religious education, and there is no official religious instruction in public schools. The Government requires all public schools and institutes of higher learning to hold regular instruction on the *Ruhnama*, but teachers reported that such training has decreased substantially. The Ministry of Education requires that each student study the *Ruhnama* for one hour each week.

Article 6 of the November 2004 law allows mosques to provide religious education to children after school for four hours a week with the approval of parents. Persons who graduate from institutions of higher religious education (the law does not specify domestic or international institutions) and who obtain CRA approval may provide religious education. Citizens have the right to receive religious education individually or with other persons; however, the law prohibits providing religious education in private, and those who do so are subject to punitive legal action. Some Sunni mosques have regularly scheduled classes on the Qur'an.

Unregistered religious groups or unregistered branches of registered religious groups are prohibited from providing religious education. The 2003 law prohibits the Russian Orthodox Church from conducting religious education programs without CRA and presidential approval, and there were no reports that either the CRA or the President approved such programs. Homeschooling usually is allowed only in cases of severe illness or disability and not for religious reasons.

In 2004 the Government formally lifted the exit visa requirement, theoretically permitting travel by all those who wished to participate in the Hajj or other travel for religious purposes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom, but there were small improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Nevertheless, troubling government practices in the treatment of some registered and unregistered groups continued. The Government officially banned only extremist groups that advocated violence, but it also categorized Islamic groups advocating stricter interpretation of Islamic religious doctrine as "extremist." The activities of unregistered religious groups remained illegal, with violators subject to fines under the administrative code. If individuals are suspected of unauthorized religious

activity, they may be subjected to search, detention, confiscation of religious materials, verbal abuse, and pressure to confess to holding an illegal meeting.

During the reporting period, at least four religious groups who applied for registration continued to be denied legal status. The Abadan branch of Light of Life Christian Church initially applied for registration in January 2007, and its application was pending at the end of the reporting period. The Turkmenbashi Word of Life Church's registration application was rejected in October 2007 for improper grammar and insufficient membership, and the group reapplied in September 2008. The Turkmen Baptist Church in Dashoguz applied in 2006, and its application was pending at the end of the reporting period. The Jehovah's Witnesses applied in August 2008; the application was rejected in December, and the group reapplied in March 2009.

Following registration with national authorities, religious groups must also obtain approval from local authorities to carry out religious activities. Some groups reported difficulties in obtaining such permission. Local authorities in Mary told the Society for Krishna Consciousness they could not register its local branch, although the Ministry of Justice had confirmed that the group's registration was valid nationally. The group continued to discuss the matter with Mary officials but had not obtained permission by the end of the reporting period.

The Roman Catholic Church remained unregistered because of a conflict with local law requiring that the head of the local Church be a citizen of the country.

Registered religious minority groups reported sporadic instances of harassment. Regional affiliates of registered groups experienced harassment by provincial and district law enforcement agencies. As in the previous reporting period, some of these groups found that by routinely notifying the Government of their gatherings and events and inviting government representatives to attend, they experienced decreased government harassment.

The Government restricted unregistered religious groups from establishing places of worship, and violations constituted an administrative offense. Registered groups also experienced difficulties establishing and maintaining places of worship; several groups stated that their largest obstacles were administrative hurdles or the lack of funds to rent a public hall. Several groups said they would prefer to buy a worship center or land to establish a permanent one, but municipal authorities raised insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles. Ten registered minority religious groups have established public places of worship, of which five were

rented, two were residential buildings used exclusively as church facilities, and three were private residential homes of group members. The Government restricted some worship services in private homes. The Government forbids unregistered religious groups or unregistered branches of registered religious groups from gathering publicly or privately and can punish individuals or groups who violate these prohibitions. Some unregistered congregations continued to practice quietly, largely in private homes.

Some religious groups were denied permission to conduct church meetings such as study groups and seminars apart from a weekly worship service.

The Government also controls access to Islamic education. The theology faculty in the history department at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat is the only academic faculty allowed to conduct Islamic education. In December 2007 the CRA told U.S. officials it planned to reestablish a separate theology faculty, reversing former President Niyazov's decision to merge the faculty with the history department in 2005. There was no evidence that the faculty had been put in place by the end of the reporting period.

The Government does not officially restrict persons from changing their religious beliefs and affiliation, but ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups accused of proselytizing and disseminating religious material generally received harsher treatment than nonethnic Turkmen. Nevertheless, two registered groups reported for the first time being able to proselytize in public without harassment. Some leaders of minority religious groups noted that random proselytizing in public was not considered culturally appropriate activity.

There were three high-level officials in the Government of Russian Jewish heritage and at least one deputy minister who was Russian Orthodox. No representatives of other minority religious groups were known to be working in senior or mid-level government positions during the reporting period. Some minority religious group adherents remained members of the only political party but feared openly acknowledging their faith out of concern for political reprisal.

The Government monitors minority religious groups. The law prohibits foreign missionary activity, although in practice both Christians and Muslims working in other capacities engaged in religious outreach. The 2003 law on religion stipulated that religious groups must report any financial or material assistance received from foreign sources. The Government denies visas to foreigners suspected of conducting or intending to conduct missionary activity.

By decree, publishing religious literature is prohibited, limiting the availability of Qur'ans, Bibles, and other religious literature. Sacred religious books are rarely available for purchase. In practice the CRA must approve imported religious literature. Because all members of the CRA are government officials, Sunni Muslims, or members of the Russian Orthodox Church, minority religious groups said they were disadvantaged regarding importation of religious materials since they have no representation on the CRA. When the CRA approves the importation of a publication, the number of imported copies cannot exceed the number of registered group members. All religious groups also reportedly are prohibited from subscribing to any foreign publications. For instance, the Russian Orthodox Church in Turkmenistan cannot receive the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* or other ROC publications. The Dashoguz office of the CRA required that its officers stamp religious literature, including Bibles and Qur'ans, to authorize them. However, in 2009, for the first time, at least one registered group reported no trouble in obtaining permission to import enough literature for its use. Some groups noted the availability of printable materials on the Internet. Registered and unregistered groups reported they were able to import ample literature clandestinely for their needs; however, they noted that there were risks to such activity. There were reports by some resident Turkish citizens that officials had seized their personal copies of the Qur'an upon arrival at the airport.

As in the previous reporting period, the Government's emphasis on studying President Niyazov's books, *Ruhnama* and *Ruhnama II*, continued to diminish significantly.

Contrary to reports from the previous period, no reports of travel restrictions for religious study or to attend religious conferences were received.

The Government financially sponsored 188 pilgrims (one planeload), of the country's quota of 4,600, personally approved by the President to travel to Mecca. The national airline provided transportation free of charge. The Government stated that other pilgrims were allowed to go on the Hajj at their own expense, and there were unconfirmed reports that two planeloads of self-paying pilgrims made the trip.

Some foreign members of registered and unregistered religious groups continued to be denied entry visas. However, in April 2009 a registered minority religious group received permission for the visit of a foreign religious leader to conduct religious services for the group.

Several registered religious minority groups reported that the Government monitored them by attending their gatherings; nonetheless, the groups continued to engage in regular activities. Officers from the Sixth Department in Ashgabat, the division charged with fighting organized crime and terrorism, monitored members of religious minorities.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of religious groups with respect to employment.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Mistreatment of some registered and unregistered religious minority group members diminished considerably during the reporting period. There were, however, detentions and interrogations, a reported beating, imprisonment for conscientious objection, seizure of religious materials, and reports of raids.

The only instance of reported physical abuse happened on May 6, 2009, when Jehovah's Witnesses reported that a Turkmenabad police officer seriously beat and abused Kasym Joraev, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Subsequently, Joraev's mother complained about the incident to the local public prosecutor. The prosecutor summoned the police officer and ordered him to pay damages to Joraev of approximately \$540 (8 million manat).

Another beating, unreported during the previous reporting period, occurred on June 19, 2008, when Ashgabat authorities detained three Jehovah's Witnesses at the Ashgabat train station while they were waiting for a train to return to Turkmenabat. Police searched them and found their religious literature. Afterward, police took them to another police station and beat one of the members when he resisted pressure to provide a written statement of explanation. Police then videotaped the three members and released them.

Ceper Annaniyazova, a previously imprisoned Hare Krishna follower, remained free after her October 2006 amnesty. Hare Krishnas reported modestly improved relations with authorities.

In the previous reporting period, in addition to the June 19, 2008 beating, Balkanabat police beat four Jehovah's Witnesses, and Turkmenbashi police hit a Word of Life pastor in the head. In 2007 police reportedly sexually molested a female Jehovah's Witness in Turkmenabat.

During incidents that involved police detention and interrogations of members of unregistered minority religious groups, authorities took a range of actions, including: filming those present; recording the names, addresses, and places of work of the congregants; threatening fines and imprisonment; and confiscating religious literature. With the exception of the 2007 Kalataevsky and Potolov cases involving alleged illegal entry into the country, there were no reports of prolonged imprisonment. Both Baptist pastors were released from prison in 2007 and subsequently deported.

There were five reported instances of detentions, arrests, interrogations, and seizure of property during the reporting period. On June 19, 2009, police picked up two female Jehovah's Witnesses, Vera Nazarova and Lyubov Khodzhamuralova, walking on a street in Ashgabat. It is unknown if they were proselytizing. Authorities held them for eight days in an overnight detention facility. The mother of one of the detainees asked police about her daughter's whereabouts and was told to ask at the Ministry of National Security, where an official instructed the mother to write what he dictated to her as a condition of the daughter's release. When the mother refused, the official threatened her with arrest, prompting the mother to leave and seek out the local procurator's office, where staff told her they knew nothing about the case and could do nothing. Upon their release, the women were fined but refused to pay.

In late March 2009 police detained two Jehovah's Witnesses in Ashgabat in a public place and brought them to meet with an imam and a representative of the local CRA. The police seized religious literature. After a one-hour discussion, they were allowed to leave.

On March 24, 2009, police forcibly took a member of Jehovah's Witnesses from his home to the mayor's office for a discussion with a security official, imam, and representative of the local CRA, after which they allowed the member to leave.

On March 9, 2009, local officials entered the home of Davran Kushmanov, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, and removed his computer and religious publications. The officials brought him to the provincial government headquarters for a discussion, after which they allowed him to leave. Following that incident, on April 22, a court gave Kushmanov a two-year suspended sentence for refusing to enlist in the military.

On August 30, 2008, police detained Jehovah's Witnesses Aleksandr Zorin and Chari Taganov while they were leaving the apartment building of a fellow believer. Police also detained the householder and believers visiting from Dashoguz and took them to a police station where police interrogated and body-searched them. Officials pressured the Jehovah's Witnesses to admit they had been conducting an illegal meeting. After four hours, police confiscated their Bibles and released the individuals. These incidents were similar to those in the previous reporting period, when in April 2007 Dashoguz and Ashgabat police, in three instances, confiscated Bibles, took members of Jehovah's Witnesses to city halls, questioned them, fined them, and released them. One of the women lost her job, reportedly on the orders of the Ministry of National Security.

Because the country does not offer alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors that would be acceptable to many young Jehovah's Witnesses, they often refuse military service. Nevertheless, they report that courts generally do not imprison them for refusing to serve (see exception below), and sometimes the president pardons them. The courts usually give suspended sentences, referred to as "conditional terms," requiring weekly reporting to authorities.

On May 24, 2009, authorities imprisoned two brothers and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Sakhemurad and Mukhammedmurad Annamamedov, in Turkmenbashi for refusal of military service as conscientious objectors. In November 2008 the Serdar City Court had sentenced them to a two-year suspended sentence (which usually does not involve arrest, but weekly reporting). However, on May 21, 2009, the authorities held a sudden court hearing, finding that because the brothers had not changed their position, they would now serve a two-year prison term. An appellate hearing on June 30 upheld the lower court's decision; they remained in prison at the end of the reporting period.

On April 22 and 20, 2009, two members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Dovran Kushmanov and Zafar Abdullaev, were criminally convicted in the Dashoguz City Court, which sentenced them to two-year conditional terms because they conscientiously objected to compulsory military service. They were obliged to report weekly to the City Police Administration.

By the end of the reporting period, the President had not pardoned Ashirgeldiyev and Shakhmuradov, two of four Jehovah's Witnesses to whom the court gave 18-month suspended sentences in July 2007 for refusing compulsory military service on the grounds of religious conscience. In October 2007 the court pardoned two of the four Jehovah's Witnesses.

In past reporting periods, individuals served time in prison for religious reasons other than conscientious objection.

The widely respected former mufti, Nasrullah Ibn Ibadullah, remained an advisor to the CRA after his pardon in August 2007.

As indicated in the reporting on detentions, arrests, and seizure of property above, raids continued but not in the number reported in previous reporting periods.

On March 29, 2009, local officials raided the home of Shirindzhan Bazarova during a gathering of family and friends. Everyone was taken to the police station and questioned about why they had gathered at Bazarova's home. After three hours, they were allowed to leave.

In a previously unreported raid during the previous reporting period, on June 15, 2008, five local officials, including an imam, a representative of the local CRA, and a police officer, disrupted a gathering of Jehovah's Witnesses in a private home in Turkmenbashi. The officials asked questions, searched the home, and reportedly threatened and verbally abused the householder and guests.

There were no updates on raids that took place during previous reporting periods, including of the Greater Grace Protestant Church in Ashgabat in 2008, the Baptist church in Balkanabat in 2007, the registered Evangelical Baptist Church in Turkmenbashi in 2007, the registered group Svet Vostoka (Light of the East) Pentecostal church in Dashoguz in 2007, and an unregistered religious group in Abadan in 2007.

In contrast with past reporting periods, Jehovah's Witnesses indicated that incidents of persecution and harassment were isolated and usually limited to local officials or police detaining them briefly at a police station or other administrative building, questioning them, and subjecting them to verbal abuse. Jehovah's Witnesses had reported numerous cases of harassment, detention, and abuse in the past two reporting periods; for example, representatives cited seven specific cases of harassment in March and April 2007, including two cases in which members lost their jobs.

During the reporting period, the Government destroyed no religious buildings but made no efforts to compensate communities for buildings destroyed during the Niyazov era.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Registered minority religious groups generally continued to report lower levels of harassment. One unregistered group's leader reported that the group's adherents gathered in small groups in private apartments and were no longer raided by police or fined as occurred in the past.

As in the previous reporting period, the Government did not destroy any mosques during the reporting period. The Government began construction of large mosques in each of the provincial capitals, as well as smaller mosques in a number of villages and towns.

The UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, carried out a mission to Turkmenistan from September 4-10, 2008, at the invitation of the Government. The Special Rapporteur reported the Government extended good cooperation during the visit. She was able to collect first-hand information by meeting members of various religious communities, both registered and unregistered.

The Government continued to allow some religious groups to host foreign visitors. In April 2009 the New Apostolic Church received permission for the first time for a visit by a European church leader.

Two minority religious groups indicated that their members were able to proselytize in the form of "street evangelism" without interference from the authorities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of general societal abuses or violence based on religious affiliation or practice. The government, through the CRA, did little to promote interfaith understanding or dialogue beyond that between Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians. Government repression of minority religious groups did not

reflect doctrinal or societal friction between the Muslim majority and minority religious groups. Rather, it reportedly reflected the Government's concern that the proliferation of nontraditional religious groups could undermine state control, promote civil unrest, facilitate undue influence by foreign interests, and destabilize the Government.

Many Muslims do not regularly attend mosques; however, the great majority of the population identifies itself as "Muslim," and national identity is linked to Islam. (Turkmen society considers an individual to be born into an ethnoreligious group.) Those who depart from these traditions receive little support or are criticized. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert from Islam to other religious groups are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts or incidents of harassment of the small Jewish community during the reporting period.

There is a societal distrust of foreign-based religious groups and the belief that Islam from outside the country is "Wahhabist" or "extremist."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and raises specific nonregistration cases with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CRA.

U.S. Embassy officers met regularly with the staff of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Center in Ashgabat, UN representatives, and other diplomatic missions to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom.

U.S. Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of registered and unregistered religious groups to monitor their status, receive reports of abuse, and discuss measures to raise their cases with the Government. These representatives are very willing to meet with embassy officials due to past Embassy advocacy on their behalf, together with the current general improvement of conditions for religious groups in the country.

TUVALU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Some traditional island councils interfered with the free practice of religion on some islands.

There were isolated reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, particularly on the northern island of Nanumanga.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago of 9 island groups with a total area of 10 square miles and a population of 9,700. The Church of Tuvalu, which has historic ties to the Congregational Church and other churches in Samoa, has the largest number of followers. Government estimates of religious affiliation as a percentage of the population include the Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 3 percent; Baha'i, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Roman Catholic, 1 percent. There are also smaller numbers of Muslims, Baptists, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The Tuvalu Brethren Church, a new charismatic Protestant group, claims to have as many as 300 adherents.

All nine island groups have traditional chiefs, all of whom are members of the Church of Tuvalu. Most followers of other religious groups or denominations are found in Funafuti, the capital, with the exception of a relatively large number of followers of the Baha'i Faith on Nanumea Island.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Although the Church of Tuvalu is by law the state church, this has few ramifications other than to afford it "the privilege of performing special services on major national events." The Constitution provides for separation of church and state. The preamble of the Constitution states the country is "an independent State based on Christian principles, the Rule of Law, and Tuvaluan custom and tradition." Government ceremonies at the national level, such as the opening of Parliament, and at the island-council level often include Christian prayers and clergy. By law, any new religious group with more than 50 members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

At the end of the reporting period, the Tuvalu Court of Appeal had not met to hear an appeal by the Tuvalu Brethren Church against a 2005 High Court judgment upholding the right of traditional island elder councils to restrict the constitutional right to freedom of religion in cases where they contended it could threaten traditional mores and practices. The Brethren case is the first appeal of a High Court decision in Tuvalu's history as an independent nation, and the Court of Appeal has never been constituted since independence.

In June 2006, despite a High Court injunction against such action, the Nanumanga council of elders passed a resolution which was implemented by the local government that dismissed without proper notice five council workers who were members of the Brethren Church. This was the result of an April 2006 council resolution that banned all new churches and threatened local civil servants with dismissal if they worshipped with the Brethren Church. Legal action instituted in October 2007 resulted in a judgment that the local government was liable for compensation for the dismissed workers.

In January 2006 the council of elders on the main island of Funafuti issued a resolution prohibiting the establishment or practice of "any new religion." The ban was primarily aimed at the Brethren Church. It forbids meetings and worship by members of the Brethren Church. The High Court issued a temporary injunction

prohibiting any further actions against the Brethren Church and its missionary work. By the end of the reporting period, the matter had not yet to come to trial.

Missionaries practiced without restriction on some islands, but on other islands traditional island elder councils have issued formal and informal bans on proselytizing by representatives of religious groups that are not already established there.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were isolated reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice in the case of the Brethren Church and other groups perceived as outside the mainstream on some outer islands, particularly on Nanumanga Island. In some cases, local traditional leaders discouraged groups from proselytizing or holding meetings, claiming that "new" religious groups may be disruptive to traditional societal structures.

Social discrimination, including acts and threats of violence, occurred against Brethren Church members on Nanumanga. Discrimination and threats prompted some Brethren Church members to leave Nanumanga for Funafuti.

The Church of Tuvalu exerts considerable influence in the social and political life of the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Fiji visited the country periodically and discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of the overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials discussed with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Tuvalu People's Lawyer the status of legal cases

surrounding the Brethren Church. Embassy officials also met with representatives of religious communities and NGOs that have an interest in other religious freedom issues.

UGANDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government restricted religious groups it perceived as "cults." Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that local officials imposed restrictions on evening congregations.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 93,000 square miles and a population of 31.3 million. According to official government figures, an estimated 85 percent of the population is Christian, 12 percent is Muslim, and the remaining 3 percent follow indigenous beliefs, Hinduism, Baha'ism, and Judaism. Some Muslims and Christians believe that the Muslim community is larger than the government numbers reflect. Of the Christian population, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church has an estimated 36 percent, and evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Orthodox Church members make up the rest. The Muslim population is primarily Sunni. Indigenous religious groups practice in some rural areas, occasionally blending their beliefs with or practicing them alongside Christianity or Islam. Indian nationals are the most significant immigrant population; members of this community are primarily Shi'a Muslim followers of the Aga Khan or practice Hinduism. The northern and West Nile regions are predominantly Catholic, while Iganga District in the east has the highest percentage of Muslims. The rest of the country has a mixture of religious affiliations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The law prohibits the creation of political parties based on religion or other similar divisions.

The Government allows religious groups to obtain legal entity status under the Trustees Incorporation Act or the Companies Act. The Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Anglican Church, and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) all registered under this provision. The evangelical and Pentecostal churches, however, have opted to register with the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Board, which requires a yearly renewal. The NGO registration process takes at least six weeks; most religious organizations were granted permits. However, the NGO Board defers registration of some church groups for various reasons, including "cultism" and activities that the Board sees as undermining government programs. Registration with the NGO Board provides certification that allows churches to access donor funding.

As a result of previous "cult activity," the Government requires Kanungu District leaders recommend local community churches to the NGO Board before the Board can approve the churches' registrations.

In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers academic study of world religious beliefs rather than instruction in one particular faith. Private madrassahs and Christian schools offer religious instruction and are common in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted religious groups it perceived as "cults." Unlike in the previous reporting period, local officials did not impose restrictions on evening congregations.

As in prior reporting periods, the Government continued to monitor the activities of groups it perceived as "cults," including the Serulanda Spiritual Foundation in Rakai District, New Heaven Church in Gulu, Rwengwara Healing Church of All

Nations in Kabarole, and the Enjiri groups in Mbale and Luwero Districts. The NGO Board denied registration to the Enjiri group in Luwero and continued to defer on the Isa Messial Congregations' registrations. In April 2009 authorities in Kabarole District closed down Believers of River Jordan Church over alleged "cult" practices.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 28, 2009, police in Luwero District arrested eight members of the Enjiri religious group for holding an illegal gathering and "sabotaging" a government Universal Primary Education Program (UPE) in the district. The group reportedly withdrew their children from UPE schools because of religious objections to identifying their children with numbers. The suspects pleaded guilty, and the court sentenced each of them to eight months' imprisonment. In October 2007 police in Mbale arrested Enjiri "cult" leader Apollo Paulo Wazaba for similar reasons; however, his case was dismissed for lack of witnesses.

In May 2008 the Kamwenge Magistrates' Court dismissed the case against 11 members of the Nyangakaibo religious group, who were charged with holding an illegal assembly, after the prosecution failed to provide sufficient evidence.

In February 2008 police in Padar detained Severino Lukoya and three of his employees for two weeks for operating the unregistered New Malta Jerusalem Church. The Government continued to decline registration to the church throughout the reporting period, citing national security concerns. Lukoya is the father of Alice Lakwena, the former leader of the now-defunct Holy Spirit Movement, which had launched an armed rebellion against the Government.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

On June 6, 2009, police in Biharwe subcounty arrested four persons, including an army officer, and charged them with trespassing in connection with the demolishing of a Seventh-day Adventist church in the area. As of the end of the reporting period, the case was pending.

On August 24, 2008, the UMSC hosted Vatican Bishop Chidi Isizoh and a group of Christian youth from several African countries to encourage greater religious tolerance. The UMSC held discussions with the group under the theme "Youth Formation Interfaith in Africa." During the reporting period, the UMSC facilitated the establishment of human rights clubs in seven Muslim schools in the central region of the country. In addition, the UMSC sponsored a weekend program on a local Muslim faith-based radio station to promote religious pluralism.

The Program for Christian and Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA)-Uganda Chapter continued efforts to promote constructive engagement and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. Launched in 2003, PROCMURA-Uganda Chapter initiated dialogues and conducted sensitization workshops for youth and women. The chapter comprises members from the Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox Churches and the UMSC. Other religious groups, such as the Uganda Joint Christian Council and the Inter-Religious Council, also conducted activities to improve respect and tolerance among religious groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

UKRAINE

The Constitution and the law on freedom of conscience provide for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Local officials at times took sides in disputes between religious organizations, and property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some communal properties.

There were reports of societal abuse and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including cases of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism. Various religious organizations continued their work to draw the Government's attention to their issues, resolve differences between various denominations, and discuss relevant legislation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and raise concerns about anti-Semitism. U.S. Embassy representatives also raised concerns about anti-Semitism with local officials and promoted ethnic and religious tolerance through public outreach events.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 233,000 square miles and a population of 45.7 million. The Government estimated there are 33,000 religious organizations representing 55 denominations in the country.

According to official government sources, Orthodox Christian organizations make up 52 percent of the country's religious groups. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate, abbreviated as UOC-MP) is the largest group, with significant presence in all regions of the country except for the Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Ternopil oblasts (regions). The UOC-MP is officially registered as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The second largest Orthodox group is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), with most followers located in western and some central oblasts. The UOC-MP does not recognize the UOC-KP. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) is the smallest of

the three Orthodox churches, with approximately 70 percent of its adherents in the western part of the country.

Adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) constitute the country's largest non-Orthodox religious group and the largest one in the western part of the country. UGCC members number approximately 4 million, with 93.5 percent located in the western regions. While members of the three Orthodox churches comprise a majority of believers in the western part of the country overall, the Greek Catholic communities constitute a majority in three of the eight western oblasts: Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil.

Some Muslim leaders estimate there are 2 million Muslims in the country, although estimates by the Government and independent think tanks put the number at 500,000. The majority are Crimean Tatars, numbering an estimated 300,000 and constituting the third-largest ethnic group in Crimea. The Crimean Tatars have their own governing council (Crimean Tatar Mejlis) and language (Crimean Tatar). Crimea's majority ethnic Russian population is predominantly affiliated with the UOC-MP.

The Roman Catholic Church, with approximately one million adherents, is traditionally associated with citizens of Polish ancestry, who live mainly in the central and western regions.

According to the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions, 30 percent of the country's religious communities are Protestant. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine (the Baptist Union) is the largest Protestant group, claiming more than 300,000 members and more than 2,700 churches.

Other communities include Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Jews, Anglicans, Calvinists, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Presbyterians, Buddhists, and adherents of Krishna Consciousness.

Based on a 2001 census, the State Committee of Statistics estimated there are 103,600 persons of ethnic Jewish origin in the country. Some Jewish community leaders, however, estimate that 170,000 citizens were born to a Jewish mother and as many as 370,000 are eligible to immigrate to Israel because of their Jewish heritage.

A 2007 survey by the independent think tank Razumkov Center found that 40 percent of respondents consider themselves believers not belonging to any denomination, while 37 percent consider themselves believers of a particular religious organization. Of the latter group, 33 percent affiliated themselves with the UOC-KP, 31 percent with the UOC-MP, 18 percent with the UGCC, and 2.5 percent with the UAOC. Less than 5 percent of those surveyed declared themselves Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, or Jews.

According to the 2007 survey, of those who considered themselves believers of a particular religious group, 34 percent said they attend religious services one to two times per year; 23 percent once in several months; 14 percent one to three times per month; 9 percent once per week; 2 percent several times per week; 6 percent once in several years; and 9 percent almost never. The survey also showed that almost 90 percent of religiously active citizens are Christians, the majority Orthodox, and that religious practice is generally strongest in the western part of the country.

According to an opinion poll conducted jointly by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the Sociology Institute of the National Academy of Sciences in October 2008, the level of public trust in religious institutions is higher than in Parliament, the business sector, and the educational and judicial systems.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and the law on freedom of conscience contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no formal state religion; however, in certain regions of the country smaller religious groups complained of unequal treatment by local authorities. In some areas of the center and south, Roman Catholics, UGCC members, and Muslims made such complaints. Conversely, in some western regions and the Sumy Oblast, local authorities at times were reluctant to address concerns of the UOC-MP.

The UOC-MP and major Protestant denominations expressed concern over President Yushchenko's continued efforts to encourage the UOC-MP and UOC-KP to overcome the differences between the two largest Orthodox communities. They

and other religious groups believed unification to be a matter better resolved by the churches themselves.

The Government observes numerous religious holidays, including Christmas, Easter Monday, and Holy Trinity Day, all according to the Julian calendar shared by the Orthodox churches and the Greek Catholics.

The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors and bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units.

The law requires religious groups to register either as a local or a national organization and to have at least ten adult members to obtain the status of a "juridical entity." Registration is necessary to conduct many business activities, including publishing, banking, and property transactions. By law the registration process should take one month, or three months if the Government requests an expert opinion on the group's legitimacy. Registration denials may be appealed in court. The Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and the Law on the State Registration of Legal Entities and Private Individuals contain contradictory provisions complicating registration of religious organizations. Despite repeated calls by the All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Parliament had not resolved the matter at the end of the reporting period.

The State Committee on Nationalities and Religions (SCNR) administers the registration process. Representatives from several denominations expressed satisfaction with the work done by the SCNR during the reporting period. On April 15, 2009, the SCNR, leaders of the Spiritual Directorate of Crimean Muslims, Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine "Umma," and the Religious Directorate of Independent Muslim Communities of Ukraine formed the Council of Representatives of Spiritual Directorates and Centers of Muslims of Ukraine. The Council is an advisory institution designed to promote dialogue between Muslim organizations and the Government.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious organizations and narrowly defines the permissible activities of members of the clergy, preachers, teachers, and other noncitizen representatives of foreign-based religious organizations; however, there were no reports that the Government used the law to limit the activity of such religious organizations. Religious worker visas require invitations from registered religious organizations in the country and government approval. Foreign religious workers may preach, administer religious ordinances,

or practice other religious activities "only in those religious organizations that invited them to the country and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints expressed concern about new procedures, which it claims limited foreign travel for foreign religious workers residing in the country. According to the church, foreign religious workers who had legally extended their visa to stay beyond the initial 90-day period experienced difficulties with the State Border Guards when reentering the country. The SCNR explained there had been no change in visa policy or intent to discriminate against foreign religious workers. According to the Government, no visa applications by foreign religious workers were rejected during the reporting period.

By law, religion cannot be part of the public school curriculum. Members of the All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations continued to support amending the law to allow religious organizations to own and operate private educational institutions where, in addition to secular curriculum, students would be brought up according to the religious values of the founding religious organization.

On October 20, 2008, the Ministry of Science and Education formed a Civil Council for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Organizations. The advisory council, including representatives of religious organizations and experts, discussed ways to enhance the Ministry's dialogue with religious organizations, adopt legislative amendments, and grant full state recognition to theology as an academic discipline.

There were more tangible results from the 2005 presidential decree to introduce "ethics of faith" training courses into public school curriculums. Its nationwide implementation was initially haphazard and was further delayed because of lack of necessary legislation and concerns raised by Jewish and Muslim leaders that training courses were based on Christian teachings. In June 2009 the Ministry of Education and Science reported an increase in the number of secondary schools offering their students optional courses in Fundamentals of Christian Ethics, Fundamentals of Religious Ethics, and Fundamentals of the Islamic Culture of the Crimea.

According to the law, registered religious organizations maintain a privileged status as the only organizations permitted to seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the Soviet regime. Communities must apply to regional authorities

for property restitution. While consideration of a restitution claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer.

On January 15, 2009, the Parliament adopted legislative amendments that give registered religious organizations the right to permanently use state-owned and communally-owned land plots, on par with the rights of state-owned and communally-owned enterprises, NGOs, and organizations of disabled people.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine reported some difficulties with registering new religious communities in Crimea due to what it considered the political bias of some local authorities.

UOC-MP representatives reported that in April 2009 the UOC-KP illegally gained ownership of the Transfiguration Church in Beyeve village, Sumy Oblast, after the village's farm director unilaterally decided the church should belong to the UOC-KP. The director attributed his decision to the fact that he personally did not like the UOC-MP priest. UOC-KP representatives denied the charge.

Mejlis members and Crimea-based human rights groups continued to criticize the Crimean government for permitting schools to use textbooks that contained inflammatory and historically inaccurate material about Crimean Tatar Muslims despite government promises to address their concerns.

Crimean Tatars claimed discrimination by mainly ethnic Russian officials in Crimea deprived them of employment in local administrations. They also alleged propaganda campaigns, particularly by so-called Russian Cossacks, promoted hostility against them among other inhabitants of Crimea. In the case of incidents involving Crimean Tatars, in which ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

Religious organizations, including members of the All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, complained their organizations did not

receive exemption from paying value-added taxes despite requests for a more favorable status.

The UOC-MP and UGCC expressed concern that the law provides no possibility for granting "legal entity" status to national religious associations. The lack of such status can complicate ownership claims of church properties when congregations change denominations. The UOC-KP, however, did not see a need for the granting of legal entity status to religious organizations in future legislation.

Members of numerous communities described difficulties in dealing with the municipal administrations in Kyiv and other large cities to obtain land and building permits or to rent office space. These problems were not limited to religious groups, however, and in many cases could be attributed to financial reasons rather than bias against a particular religious community.

UOC-KP representatives reported Kyiv's local government gave to the UOC-MP more land plots for church construction than to the UOC-KP.

The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) in Lviv continued to call on the city administration to provide legal protections for the city's former "Ture Zahav" synagogue and surrounding historical structures. The city stated it was waiting on the findings of an archeological study to verify the structures' historical authenticity.

On September 2, 2008, the Jewish community in Vinnytsya reached an agreement with the city administration over the excavation of a building foundation on the site of a former Jewish cemetery in the city. The city implemented the reburial of the human remains exposed by the digging. The Jewish community, however, called for the city to implement the mayor's promise to construct a fence around the cemetery to better protect the site.

UOC-MP representatives in Lviv Oblast continued to complain that local governments in Stryi, Zhydachiv, Mykolayiv, and Pustomyty refused to allocate land for church construction. UOC-MP representatives in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast stated that local authorities in Dolyna had not issued an approval to the parish of St. John the Baptist for the construction of a church.

The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine complained that although the municipal government of Kyiv designated burial space for Muslims in a city

cemetery, Christian burials had occurred on the designated land plot and the Muslim community did not have adequate burial space.

In August 2008 the Jewish community reiterated previous complaints that the open-air Krakivskiy Market in Lviv was located on the grounds of an ancient Jewish cemetery and that periodic digging to erect market kiosks disturbed the sanctity of the site. They called on the city to relocate the market. The city offered to construct a memorial park on the remaining undeveloped part of the cemetery in 2010 but explained it could not relocate the market because some of the buildings at the market were private property.

UGCC representatives complained the Yalta Municipal Council refused to finalize the allocation of a land plot for the construction of what would be the only Greek Catholic church in the city. They also reported reluctance of municipal governments in Kyiv, Kyiv Oblast, Simferopol, Yevpatoriya, and Zhytomyr to allocate land for church construction.

Muslim representatives in Simferopol criticized the local city council for its refusal to allocate land for the construction of a new central mosque. On April 30, 2009, President Yushchenko signed a degree instructing the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea to facilitate resolution of the land issue. The Simferopol City Council continued to delay resolution of the issue.

Restitution of communal property confiscated by the Soviet regime remained a problem. The slow pace of restitution was partly a reflection of the country's budgetary situation, which limited funds available to relocate occupants of seized religious property. In addition, restitution claims for the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities were complicated by intracommunal competition for particular properties. The SCNR declared that the majority of buildings and objects already had been returned to religious organizations and that restitution of many remaining confiscated properties was complicated by the fact that they were occupied by state institutions, were historic landmarks, or had been transferred to private ownership. The SCNR cited a lack of government funding to help relocate the organizations occupying these buildings. The SCNR also noted restitution claims frequently fall under the jurisdiction of local governments.

Some observers expressed concern about the effectiveness and the transparency of the Interagency Commission on Restitution of Property to Religious Organizations. All major religious organizations called on the Government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims. The All-Ukraine Council of

Churches and Religious Organizations continued to call on Parliament to impose a moratorium on the privatization and sale of previously confiscated religious buildings in state and communal ownership, but Parliament did not adopt such legislation. The Government also noted that the slow rate of construction of new houses of worship could not match a steady 2 to 3 percent annual increase in the number of religious communities.

According to the SCNR, in 2008 religious communities were granted either ownership of or the right to use 195 premises (i.e., buildings or sections of buildings). The premises were either originally designated as or later used as places of worship.

The Karaite community in Kyiv continued to demand the return of a "kenesa" building (place of worship), used as the "Actor's House" since the Soviet era. According to the SCNR, the Kyiv Municipal Council had no intention of returning the property.

Representatives of the Religious Union for Progressive Jewish Congregations of Ukraine complained of continued property restitution difficulties with the Kharkiv and Kyiv municipal governments.

At the end of the reporting period, the Government had not transferred ownership of St. Nicholas' Cathedral and a former bishops' residence in Kyiv to the Roman Catholic Church. It permitted, however, the Church to use the cathedral for daily morning mass, on weekends, and during major religious holidays. Church representatives also expressed frustration about unrealized restitution claims of buildings formerly belonging to St. Oleksander's Church in Kyiv, which they stated were improperly privatized in the 1990s, as well as properties in Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Mykolayiv, Odesa, Sevastopol, and Simferopol.

The Roman Catholic Community in Dnipropetrovsk complained a private company had illegally gained ownership of the St. Joseph Church in 1998 in the city and had damaged it during a demolition project in 2008. They called for the Government to facilitate return of the building to the community. On June 25, 2009, the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Economic Court declared the St. Joseph parish a legitimate owner of the St. Joseph Church and ordered the company to transfer the church building to the parish. According to parish representatives, the municipal government acted as the third party in the court proceedings, facilitating return of the church.

UGCC representatives said authorities in Lviv had not returned premises adjacent to St. George's Cathedral. Local officials declared the Government did not have the money to resettle more than a dozen families residing there since the Soviet era.

Odesa's Presbyterian community claimed it continued to have difficulties occupying its historic church building because local and regional courts continued to refuse to implement a higher court's decision to evict the actors' guild, which has occupied part of the building since the Soviet era. In May 2008 the Presbyterian community requested that the European Court of Human Rights hear the case. At the end of the reporting period, the court had accepted but not decided the case.

The UOC-MP and UOC-KP continued to disagree concerning the Holy Trinity Church in Rokhmaniv Village, Shumsk District, Ternopil Oblast, despite an August 2006 ruling by the High Administrative Court that the UOC-MP parish was a legitimate user of the church.

The Yazlovets Village Council in Ternopil Oblast refused to implement the Ternopil Oblast State Administration's 2002 decision to return ownership of a local Roman Catholic convent to the Roman Catholic Church. On October 7, 2008, the Lviv Appellate Administrative Court upheld the convent's ownership rights to the building.

According to Roman Catholic representatives in Odesa, the Government continued to refuse to facilitate the restitution of Odesa's Roman Catholic seminary, which was confiscated by the Soviet regime.

Representatives of the Muslim community noted the slow pace of communal property restitution. Muslim community leaders complained in particular about unresolved restitution claims involving a 118-year-old mosque in Mykolayiv, a famed mosque in Dnipropetrovsk, a 150-year-old mosque in the Crimean town of Masandra, a mosque in Yalta, and the ruins of an 18th-century mosque in the Crimean coastal city of Alushta.

In February 2007 the Zhytomyr Oblast Archives, with the approval of the National Archives, ordered the seizure of Torah scrolls belonging to the Jewish community in Zhytomyr. In March and April 2009, fragments of Torah scrolls, most of them beyond repair, were returned to the Jewish community. At the end of the reporting period, the majority of usable Torah scrolls remained with the National Archives.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no updates on the November 2007 incident reported by the Missionary Evangelical Center Word of Life, in which an unidentified man accompanying policemen threatened the center's representatives with a pistol while carrying out a court-ordered eviction in Kyiv and in which police had threatened observers with imprisonment if they publicized the incident.

There were no new developments in the August 2007 armed police raid on a Pentecostal church in Yevpatoria during services.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On June 10, 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a resolution permitting the UOC-KP use of the St. Michael's Cathedral of the St. Michael's monastery, and the UOC-MP use of the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra for daily services.

On June 10, 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers approved proposals by the State Property Fund and Lviv Oblast State Administration to return the premises of the former Theological Seminary in Lviv to the Roman Catholic Church.

On April 22, 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers allowed the Patriarchy of the UAOC to use the St. Andrew's Church in Kyiv for daily services.

On April 15, 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a resolution to fund software upgrades to facilitate issuance of foreign travel passports to citizens who refuse to receive a personal tax identification number because of their religious views.

On March 25, 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers reduced rental rates for religious organizations using state-owned property to 45 percent of rental fees charged to commercial entities. The reduction is effective until January 1, 2010.

At the synagogue in Lutsk, the local government responded to credible security concerns by constructing a fence around the building and giving ownership of the building to the Jewish community, which had formerly been leased.

In April 2009 the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast State Administration issued a resolution to return the Holy Trinity Cathedral to the UOC-MP.

On January 15, 2009, the Parliament adopted legislative amendments giving registered religious organizations the right to permanently use state-owned and communally-owned land plots.

The SCNR, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Border Guard Committee, State Customs Service, State Committee for Tourism, and other agencies, cooperated to support Jewish pilgrimages to the burial site in Uman of Rabbi Nakhman Tsadyk, founder of the Bratslav Hasidic movement. According to the SCNR, more than 15,000 Hasidim from 20 countries traveled to Uman in September 2008. Growing numbers of Jewish pilgrims have been visiting burial sites of prominent spiritual leaders in Medzhybizh, Berdychiv, and Hadyach.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were a number of acts of violence against persons and property based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Anti-Semitic violence continued to be a problem and was part of an overall increase in violent hate crimes during the reporting period. According to the Congress of Ethnic Communities and Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (Vaad), there were four victims of three anti-Semitic incidents in 2008 with no deaths.

On September 13, 2008, a group of youths shouting anti-Semitic abuse assaulted Vinnytsya Rabbi Shaul Horovitz, his young son, and a friend. Police arrested the attackers. A local court ordered the attackers to pay a fine for committing an act of "hooliganism."

There were several incidents involving hate speech against Jewish persons and institutions as well as against other groups.

Churches, synagogues, cemeteries, and memorials were vandalized on several occasions. In July 2008 Crimean police detained three students on charges of Christian cemetery desecration. From April 2007 to March 2008, the suspects committed eight acts of vandalism at a cemetery in the Simferopol District.

On June 17, 2009, Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko directed the police to conduct more thorough investigations into cases of cemetery vandalism. From January to June 2009, police recorded 619 incidents of cemetery vandalism, said the Minister.

On May 25, 2009, unidentified attackers painted swastikas on the walls of the Jewish Charity Center in Feodosia. Representatives of the Center attributed lack of progress in investigation of the case to lax attitude of local police toward previous anti-Semitic incidents.

On May 6, 2009, unidentified offenders set fire to the St. Olga Church of the UOC-KP in Mariupol. Police continued to investigate the incident.

On May 1, 2009, unidentified vandals set fire to the entrance door of the UOC-MP Church in Mezhyrich Village, Sumy Oblast. Authorities were investigating the incident.

On April 7, 2009, vandals destroyed a cross installed by UOC-KP representatives at the site of future reconstruction of the Dormition Church in Okhtyrka.

On February 19, 2009, unidentified attackers overturned a cross installed at the entrance to the St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church in Dnipropetrovsk.

On February 8, 2009, vandals painted antireligious graffiti on the walls of the Transfiguration Cathedral of the UOC-MP in Pryluky, Chernihiv Oblast. In March police detained four suspects.

On December 4, 2008, vandals smashed windows in a synagogue in Rivne. The vandals were not identified, and the police investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On October 15, 2008, a group smashed the windows of the offices to the Jewish Agency in Chernihiv. The police investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Anti-Semitic articles appeared frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appeared in the national press. The Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP, which in previous years had accounted for nearly 90 percent of the country's anti-Semitic print media), sharply reduced its output. Researchers recorded 53 anti-Semitic publications in major print media outlets in 2008, compared to 542 in 2007. The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine attributed the sharp decrease to several factors, including political, administrative and social pressure on MAUP by NGOs, political parties, politicians, and the Government; that MAUP lost a large number of court cases; and the loss of potential students due to MAUP's deteriorating reputation.

Jewish community leaders in Kherson repeatedly complained that Serhiy Kyrychenko, a member of the city council, was spreading anti-Semitic propaganda. Kyrychenko made frequent appearances on the local radio show "Vik," accusing Jews of robbing the Ukrainian people and plotting to enslave Ukrainians and exterminate Slavs.

In the summer of 2008, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) exposed a plot by a group of ultra-right extremists led by a former policeman in Kirovograd to blow up Kirovograd's Choral Synagogue. Representatives of the local SBU branch stated leaders of the group studied literature on Nazi Germany and Hitler and planned to attack local Jews. The group also was reported to have planned to assault foreigners. Members of the group were detained but later released after law enforcement officials threatened to prosecute further criminal activity. On October 7, 2008, the media reported the SBU forwarded the case to the Kirovograd prosecutor's office for further investigation.

In February 2009 an improvised explosive device was found in a synagogue in Lutsk. Investigators determined the device contained explosives but was not wired to detonate. The Jewish community called for a full investigation.

On November 22, 2008, representatives of the Poltava Oblast Society of Soviet Political Prisoners and the Repressed erected seven wooden crosses on land in Poltava designated for a synagogue. According to the group, the crosses were erected to commemorate the anniversary of the Stalin-era famine, and they did not know the land was intended for construction of a synagogue. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Segal stated the act was a provocation intended to stir religious hatred in the city. The Poltava Mayor's Office described the act as unauthorized and illegal.

The UOC-KP and UAOC continued to dispute ownership of the St. George Church in Odesa. This dispute resulted from an archpriest's change of affiliation from the UOC-KP to the UAOC.

UOC-MP supporters in Chernihiv continued to protest the Chernihiv Oblast State Administration's 2006 decision to transfer the St. Catherine Church (which had been used as a museum) to the UOC-KP. In December 2008 the Chernihiv Municipal Council attempted to ease the social and religious tensions surrounding the issue by banning transfer of the building to the UOC-KP and ordering that the church remain a museum.

The Government continued to promote interfaith understanding by frequently consulting with the All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, which represents more than 90 percent of the religiously active population. In April 2009 the Ministry of Defense and major religious groups formed the Council for Pastoral Support. The Health Ministry's Civic Council for Cooperation with the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations held its inaugural meeting on June 4, 2009.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government and religious leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Ambassador, embassy officers, and officials in Washington maintained ongoing dialogue with government and religious leaders and stayed in close contact with clerics, lay religious leaders, and NGOs that promote religious freedom. The Embassy tracked developments in religious freedom and cultural heritage preservation, including the status of Jewish cemeteries in Lviv, Uman, and Volodymyr-Volynsky, and monitored cases involving discrimination against Tatars in Crimea. U.S. government officials raised concerns over religious freedom and anti-Semitism with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office of the Prosecutor General, Office of the Prime Minister, Presidential Secretariat, and local officials. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials, including the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, also raised concerns directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Science and Education, and the country's Embassy in Washington about the anti-Semitic teachings and publications of MAUP. The Ambassador and other embassy officers met with members of the Crimean Tatar community to hear their concerns.

Throughout the reporting period, the Ambassador raised the broader topics of communal property restitution and cultural heritage preservation in meetings and correspondence with government officials at the highest levels. The Embassy met with the deputy mayor of Lviv to inquire regarding complaints of hotel construction on the site of the city's former synagogue (which was destroyed during the Holocaust), possible destruction of remaining historic buildings, and the status of the historic Jewish cemetery located on the grounds of the Krakivskiy Market.

The Ambassador met with leaders of the Jewish and Islamic communities, and embassy officers met with religious leaders in Kyiv, Odesa, and Crimea to better understand these communities' concerns.

Embassy officers continued to maintain close contact not only with clerics but also with lay leaders in religious communities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations, such as Caritas, the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the NCSJ. The Embassy continued to intervene as necessary to defend foreign religious workers' rights to due process under the law.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion with some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of the country, and the Government defines all citizens as Muslims.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Adherents of most major religions in the country worshipped without government interference, although there were restrictions. The Government controls virtually all Sunni mosques and places general restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, including for religious purposes. Nonetheless, religious groups with dedicated religious buildings can worship and conduct business. The Government follows a policy of tolerance toward non-Muslim religious groups and in practice interfered very little in their religious activities. Proselytizing and publicly distributing non-Islamic religious literature is prohibited.

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, although societal pressure discouraged conversion from Islam to other religions, and there were instances of discriminatory caricatures in the media.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 32,300 square miles and a population of 4.8 million. An estimated 80 percent of the country's residents are noncitizens. Of the citizens, more than 85 percent are Sunni Muslim and an estimated 15 percent or fewer are Shi'a. Noncitizen residents are predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there are substantial numbers from the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia, and North America. According to the most recent Ministry of Economy census (2005), 76 percent of the total population is Muslim, 9 percent is Christian, and 15 percent is "other." According to unofficial figures, at least 15 percent of the resident population is Hindu, and 5 percent is Buddhist. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Parsi, Baha'i, Sikh, and Jews. These estimates differ from census figures because census figures do not take into

account "temporary" visitors and workers and they count Baha'is and Druze as Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion with some restrictions.

The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the federal union. The Government funds or subsidizes almost 95 percent of Sunni mosques and employs all Sunni imams. Five percent of Sunni mosques are considered private, and several mosques have large private endowments. The Government recognizes more than 30 Christian denominations and issues many of them land-use permits for the construction and operation of churches.

There is a dual system consisting of Shari'a (Islamic) courts for criminal and family law matters and secular courts for civil law matters. Shi'a Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shi'a family law cases (marriage, death, and inheritance cases) through a special Shi'a council rather than the Shari'a courts. Non-Muslims are sometimes tried for criminal offenses in Shari'a courts. Not all crimes are punishable by Shari'a penalties. In cases punishable by a Shari'a penalty, non-Muslims generally receive civil penalties at the discretion of the judge. Shari'a penalties imposed on non-Muslims also may be overturned or modified by a higher court.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims and non-Muslims are required by law to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking in public during fasting hours out of respect for Islamic practice. Shi'a are free to celebrate Ashura according to their customs.

The General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments oversees most issues related to Islamic affairs in the country. The General Authority distributes weekly guidance to Sunni imams regarding subject matter, themes, and content of religious sermons and ensures that clergy do not deviate frequently or significantly from approved topics in their sermons. Most imams are noncitizens; a significant number are Egyptian or Syrian. The Government does not appoint sheikhs (imams) for Shi'a mosques, except in Dubai, where the Department of Islamic

Affairs and Endowments controls the appointment of clergy and their conduct in all mosques. Shi'a clergy are free to choose the subjects of their sermons, which reportedly did not deviate in practice from approved topics during the reporting period.

The Shi'a minority, concentrated in the emirates of Dubai and Sharjah, is free to worship and maintain its own mosques. All Shi'a mosques are considered private and may receive funds from the Government upon request.

While the Government does not require formal licensing or registration requirements for non-Muslim religious groups, it monitors their growth and development through land grants and grants permission on a case-by-case basis to build houses of worship when congregations outgrow smaller private facilities. The Government follows a policy of tolerance toward non-Muslim religious groups and in practice interferes very little in their religious activities. The Government seeks to encourage citizens to avoid extremist tendencies or ideologies.

All schools, regardless of religion, must be registered with the Government. Islamic studies are mandatory in public schools (schools supported by the federal government primarily for citizens) and in private schools for Muslim children. Instruction of any religion other than Islam is not permitted in public schools; however, religious groups may conduct religious instruction for their members in their dedicated religious facilities. Private schools found to be teaching subjects that offend Islam, defame any religion, or contravene the country's ethics and beliefs may face penalties, including potential closure. Private parochial schools are free to teach their religion within the bounds of government guidelines and to practice religious rituals.

Although textbooks have been banned in the past for containing material offensive to Islam, there were no new reports of banned school books during the reporting period.

Proselytizing and distributing non-Islamic religious literature are prohibited under penalty of criminal prosecution, imprisonment, and deportation, on the grounds that such behavior transgresses core Islamic teachings. Although there are no specific laws against missionary activity, in the past the Government has reportedly threatened to revoke the residence permits of persons suspected of proselytizing for religions other than Islam.

Immigration authorities routinely asked foreigners applying for residence permits to declare their religious affiliation on residence applications; however, the Government reportedly does not collect or analyze this information, and there were no reports of religious affiliation negatively affecting the issuance or renewal of visas or residence permits.

During the period covered by this report, rulers of various emirates pardoned at least 2,000 prisoners on religious and national holidays, without regard to the prisoners' religious affiliations. Those pardoned generally were serving sentences of 3 to 5 years for financial crimes, immigration violations, and other relatively minor offenses; pardons reportedly were not extended to prisoners convicted of rape, murder, or kidnapping.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Waqfa, Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension Day, and Eid al-Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Adherents of most major religions in the country worshipped without government interference, although there were restrictions. As the state religion, Islam is favored over other religious groups, and conversion to Islam is viewed favorably.

Under Shari'a, Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women who are "people of the book" (Christian or Jewish women); however, Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men unless the man converts to Islam. Because Islam does not consider marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman valid, both parties to such a union are subject to arrest, trial, and imprisonment on grounds of fornication. There were no reports of such penalties applied during the period covered by this report.

Shari'a, according to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, applies in cases of divorce. According to a new personal status law, women generally are granted custody of female children until they reach the age of 13 and are granted custody of male children until they reach the age of 10. If the mother is deemed unfit, custody reverts to the next able female relative on the mother's side. Shari'a as practiced in the country permits polygamy (up to four legal wives).

Conversion from Islam to another religion is not recognized, and no data was available to assess if any such conversions took place. Converts may be persuaded to return to the Islamic fold, may conceal their new faith, or may travel to another country where their conversion is recognized to avoid the social stigma of converting from Islam to another religion.

A list of expatriate converts to Islam is published annually by the Government.

Non-Muslim groups can own houses of worship, where they can practice their religion freely, by requesting a land grant and permission from the local ruler to build a compound (the title for the land remains with the ruler). Those with land grants are not charged rent on this property. The Emirate of Sharjah also waives utility payments for religious buildings. There is no national standard for granting official status to religious groups or approving land grants. Rather, rulers of the individual emirates exercise autonomy in choosing whether to grant access to land and permission to build houses of worship within their emirate. The lack of clear guidelines can present a barrier to the acquisition of official status, leading to confusion and delay; a handful of requests were pending, some for years. Religious groups without dedicated buildings of worship often use the facilities of other religious groups or worship in private homes. There were no reports of government interference in this common practice.

Even though Christians represent a minority of the non-Muslim population, their facilities for worship outnumber those of other non-Muslim communities. The Government appears to look upon Christian congregations more favorably when considering land grants for houses of worship.

There are at least 33 Christian churches in the country built on land donated by the ruling families of the emirates in which they are located. In some cases, chapels are clustered in close proximity to one another or in locations some distance from the residential areas in which their congregation members live, effectively limiting attendance. Four emirates are home to Christian primary and secondary schools, in which students are generally free to study Christianity and perform religious rituals. The Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai donated land for Christian cemeteries, and Abu Dhabi also donated land for a Baha'i cemetery.

The Government does not permit churches to display crosses on the outside of their premises or to erect bell towers; however, this restriction is not always enforced, and some churches display cross designs on their buildings. Some churches were overcrowded and conducted services or masses in open courtyards on special

occasions due to limited space. There was no government interference within church compounds. As the Government does not recognize or permit conversion from Islam to another religion, churches accept converts from all religions except Islam.

There are no synagogues for the small expatriate Jewish population; however, Jews observed holidays in private residences without interference.

There are two Hindu temples, at least one of which is shared with Sikhs, in Dubai. A new Sikh temple was under construction in Dubai. There are no Buddhist temples. Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs conducted religious ceremonies in private homes without interference. There was reportedly a pending request to build a temple for the growing Buddhist population.

There are two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the large Hindu community, one each in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. New crematoriums anticipated in al-Ain and Sharjah encountered delays. However, the crematoriums currently in use meet present demand. Official permission must be obtained for their use in every instance; however, procedures are straightforward and do not appear to create hardship. The Government allows people from all religions except Islam to use the cremation facilities.

Workers generally do not build Hindu temples at work sites, partly because facilities would need dedicated caretakers to maintain the temples according to Hindu practice, and such individuals may not be available. There were no reports during the reporting period of municipalities dismantling temples built by Hindu workers in labor camps.

Non-Muslim groups raise money from their congregations and receive financial support from abroad. Religious groups openly advertise religious functions in the press, such as holiday celebrations, memorial services, religious conventions, choral concerts, and fundraising events. Non-Muslim religious leaders reported that customs authorities rarely questioned the entry of religious materials such as Bibles and hymnals into the country, unless the materials are printed in Arabic. In the past, customs authorities questioned the entry of religious materials deemed in excess of the normal requirements of existing congregations, although in most instances the items were permitted entry. Customs authorities reportedly were less likely to question the importation of Christian religious items than that of other non-Muslim religious items. Nonetheless, in virtually all instances, importation of the material in question was eventually permitted.

The country's two Internet service providers, Etisalat and du, occasionally blocked websites containing religious information. These sites included information on the Baha'i Faith, Judaism, atheism, negative critiques of Islam, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity. The Government's Cyber Crime Law provides penalties for using the Internet to preach against Islam, inciting someone to commit sin, and using the Internet to promote a breach of public decency. No incidents were reported during the period covered by this report.

The Advisor to the President on Judicial and Religious Affairs, al-Sayed Ali al-Hashemi, as well as Chairman Hamdan Al Mazroui and Director General Mohammed Matar Al Kaabi of the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, regularly represented the country at Islamic, ecumenical, and Christian conferences and events abroad and met regularly with religious leaders in the country.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

At the end of the reporting period, three large, non-Islamic religious institutions were under construction in Dubai: a Coptic church, an Eastern Orthodox church, and a Sikh temple.

On May 11, 2009, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research met with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a group founded to fight anti-Semitism and bigotry. They discussed the need to cultivate cooperation, fraternity, and peace, irrespective of differences in customs, traditions, faith, ethnicity, and culture.

On December 25, 2008, Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed joined thousands of Christians and other pilgrims for midnight mass in Bethlehem to mark the Christmas holiday.

In October 2008 the Mar Thoma Church was granted land to build a church in Al Ain in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Also that month, the leader of the Federal National Council, Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, led a delegation to meet with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. The Pope acknowledged the Government's efforts to promote a culture of religious tolerance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, although societal pressures discouraged conversion from Islam to other religions, and there were instances of discriminatory caricatures in the media.

There were anti-Semitic or religiously intolerant editorials, op-eds, and editorial cartoons in the English and Arabic-language electronic and print media. The Arabic-language press, including newspapers such as *Al-Ittihad*, *Al-Bayan*, and *Al-Khaleej*, carried editorial cartoons depicting stereotypical and negative images of Jews along with Jewish symbols.

Citizens expressed concern regarding the influence of the cultures of the country's foreign majority on Emirati society (including the influence on Emirati children of non-Emirati household help). However, in general, citizens were familiar with foreign societies and believed that the best way to balance foreign influence was by supporting and strengthening indigenous cultural traditions.

Non-Muslim religious leaders from both within and outside the country regularly referred to it as one of the most liberal countries in the region in terms of governmental and societal attitudes toward allowing all persons to practice their religions freely. Although citizens regarded the country as a Muslim country that should respect Muslim religious sensibilities on matters such as public consumption of alcohol, modest dress, and public deportment, the society also emphasized respect for privacy and Islamic traditions of tolerance, particularly with respect to some Christian groups. Western casual attire for men and women was permitted throughout the country.

Many hotels, stores, and other businesses patronized by both citizens and foreigners were permitted to sell alcohol and pork to non-Muslims and to acknowledge openly non-Muslim holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Diwali (although such displays generally are not permitted during the month of Ramadan). Shopping centers were festive during Christian holidays, and traditional Christian holiday foods, decorations, posters, books, and videotapes were widely available.

School children gathered in malls across the country to sing Christmas carols while "department store Santas" handed out gifts. The news media regularly printed reports of religious holiday celebrations, including church services.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

U.S. embassy officials in Abu Dhabi and consulate general officials in Dubai discussed religious tolerance and freedom with government officials on a number of occasions and encouraged the Government to increase religious freedom by permitting the opening or expansion of religious facilities for the large expatriate population.

Embassy officials met with the leadership of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments on a regular basis to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. Embassy officials also met periodically with the President's Religious Affairs Advisor al-Hashemi to discuss religious tolerance and interfaith cooperation.

Additionally, embassy and consulate general officers helped protect religious freedom by monitoring its status through informal inquiries and meetings with government officials and representatives of religious groups.

UNITED KINGDOM

The law provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was a slight improvement in respect for religious freedom for non-Christian believers, while Christians continued to complain about the ability to express their faith in the workplace.

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Violence declined in Northern Ireland. Anti-Semitic acts rose sharply in January and February 2009 during and immediately after the Israeli military action in Gaza. A significant number of "Islamophobic" incidents occurred, and public debate continued over the role of Islam in society. Representatives of other religions reported few negative religiously motivated acts.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 94,525 square miles and a population of 61.1 million. Christians make up 72 percent of the population, including the Church of England, Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestants, and many unaffiliated Christian groups. In 2003 the Office of National Statistics estimated 29 percent of the population identified with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Catholic Church, and 14 percent with Protestant churches. In December 2007 a survey reported that the number of Catholics attending Sunday services had overtaken the number of Anglicans doing so. A September 2006 English Church Census reported that Methodists were decreasing as a percentage of the population, while members of The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostal churches, many churches from Africa, and the Eastern Orthodox Church, almost entirely immigrants, were increasing.

Individuals with no religious belief constituted 15 percent of the population. Muslims composed 3 percent of the population. The Muslim community is predominantly South Asian in origin, but other groups from the Arabian Peninsula, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Levant are represented. In addition, there is a

growing number of indigenous converts. Although estimates vary, the Government places the number of mosques in the whole country at one thousand. Groups comprising 1 percent or less of the population include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. Individuals from Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh backgrounds are concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

Attendance at religious services was significantly different from the number of adherents. According to Christian Research's *Religious Trends* report released on May 8, 2008, four million Christians attend services on a regular basis (defined as at least once a month) in the country. These figures do not include Northern Ireland, where higher percentages reportedly attend both Catholic (more than 60 percent), and Protestant (more than 35 percent) services. The report stated that more than 50 percent of Muslims regularly worship at mosques. Figures for Jews and other religious groups were unavailable.

Religious affiliation was not evenly distributed among ethnicities. According to the 2001 census, approximately 70 percent of the white population described themselves as Christians. Nearly 75 percent of black Caribbean respondents stated that they were Christians, as did 70 percent of black Africans. Meanwhile, 45 percent of Indians were Hindus and 29 percent were Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims.

In Northern Ireland, where divisions between nationalists and unionists evolved largely along religious lines, the 2001 census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 percent were Catholics. Many Catholics and Protestants continued to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, although many middle class neighborhoods were mixed communities. The policy of the Government remained one of promotion of religious tolerance.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The 1998 Human Rights Act guarantees freedom of religion, and the 2006 Equality Act bans discrimination based on religion.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006, which came into effect in 2007, includes "Incitement to Religious Hatred" among its prohibitions, and the penalties are similar to the "Incitement to Racial Hatred" provisions included in previous laws that are used in other hate crime prosecutions. The Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 1998 defines "religious hatred" as hatred against a group of persons that may be determined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief. The act does not define religion or what constitutes a religious belief but leaves that determination to the courts. Offenses under the act must be threatening and intended to stir up religious hatred based on the following criteria: the use of words, behavior, or display of written material; publishing or distributing written material; the public performance of a play; distributing, showing, or playing a recording; broadcasting or including a program in a program service; or the possession of written materials or recordings with a view to display, publish, distribute, or include in a program service. The act does not apply where words or behavior are used or displayed inside a private dwelling and does not apply to criticism or dislike of a religious belief. The maximum penalty for stirring up religious hatred is seven years in prison. This act gives only constables the power to arrest persons in the context of these offenses, rather than allowing "citizens' arrests."

The Equality Act of 2006 makes it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of "religion or belief" or the "lack of religion or belief" in the provision of goods, facilities and services, education, the use and disposal of property, and the exercise of public functions. Religious discrimination in employment and vocational training is illegal under the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations. The Equality Act established the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), which began work in 2007 and is responsible for promoting an awareness of the act's provisions, promoting equality and diversity, and working towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment. The CEHR receives and is accountable for public funds but is independent of the Government. The CEHR has powers to investigate unlawful acts of discrimination and can bring legal proceedings against violators of the Equality Act's provisions. In Scotland the CEHR covers only human rights matters reserved for the Parliament and major government ministries. Human rights for matters "devolved" to the Scottish Parliament are covered by the Scottish Human Rights Commission. The Equality Act allows the CEHR to cover devolved matters if it has the agreement of the proposed Scottish Commission.

In Northern Ireland religious discrimination in employment has been illegal since 1976 and discrimination in goods and services has been illegal since 1998. This,

and all other equality legislation, is supervised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which has similar powers to those of the CEHR.

The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" (where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime) face higher maximum penalties.

Under the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the 2003 Communications Act, religious bodies can hold local and national digital radio and digital terrestrial television licenses.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) reported that in 2007-08, it prosecuted 13,008 racially and religiously motivated crimes, of which 10,398 led to convictions. Current statistics do not differentiate between religiously and racially motivated crimes. These rates represented an increase from the previous year, when there were 11,713 prosecutions leading to 9,017 convictions.

There are two established (or state) churches--The Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian)--but Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not have "official" religions. The 1921 Church of Scotland Act reorganized the Church as Scotland's national church based on a Presbyterian system but not dependent on any government body or the Queen for spiritual matters or leadership.

The monarch appoints Church of England officials on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Crown Appointments Commission, which includes lay and clergy representatives. The General Convention of the Church of Scotland appoints its own office bearers, and its affairs are not subject to any civil authority. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion.

The Bill of Rights of 1689 and the Act of Settlement of 1701 forbid any Catholic, or person married to a Catholic, from becoming monarch. The monarch is the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England and must always be a member of and promise to uphold the Church. The monarch's connection with the Church of England was the subject of public debate, and in 2009 a Member of Parliament (MP) tried to introduce legislation to remove the ban on Roman Catholics becoming the monarch. The Government has agreed that the ban on Catholics

becoming monarch needs to be considered, although some Christians worry that this would diminish the role of the Church in the country. There is disagreement within the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom as to the importance of the issue. The head of the Catholic Church in Scotland has described the ban as "state-sponsored sectarian discrimination," while the new head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales has stated that it is low on his list of priorities.

Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed upon have the right to appeal to the courts for relief. The Government includes other religious groups in national events; for example, under the auspices of the Church of England, the Queen supported invitations to representatives of a broad range of religious groups to participate in the national Remembrance Day Service. The Government made efforts to address specific needs of different religious communities, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's annual provision of a special Hajj delegation to provide consular and medical assistance to the country's Muslims on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

Immigration regulations require visa applicants who wish to enter the country as "ministers of religion" (a legal term used for visas) to demonstrate a level-four competence in spoken English on the International English Language Testing System. Visa adjudicators are permitted to waive the testing requirement at their discretion and where other evidence of English competency is provided for applicants educated in an English-speaking country. "Ministers of religion" are also required to have worked for at least one year in the last five as a "minister" and when applying for visas must also have one year of full-time experience or two years of part-time training following their ordination for religious groups where ordination is the sole means of entering the ministry. To obtain an entry visa a missionary must be trained as such or have worked previously as a missionary.

On May 8, 2008, Parliament abolished the crime of blasphemy against the Church of England. Despite a number of attempts, the law had not been enforced in decades.

Religiously motivated hate language is prosecuted under various sections of the Public Order Act and the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006, which the Crown Prosecution Service applies to demonstrations where insulting and abusive language is used about religion. Christian groups expressed concern over a recent addition to the Public Order Act that criminalizes "homophobic" hate speech. A Northern Ireland MP was investigated by the police under similar legislation in

Northern Ireland after she criticized homosexual practice in a radio interview. The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland decided not to prosecute.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization, established or otherwise, receives direct funding from the Government, with the exception of "faith schools." The Government provides financial support--up to 90 percent of the total capital costs of the buildings and 100 percent of running costs, including teachers' salaries--to sectarian educational institutions that are commonly referred to as "faith schools" (see Section III).

The Government also helps fund the repair and maintenance of all listed places of worship for religious groups nationwide and contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves disused Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities, since the advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose. Charities are exempt from taxes on most types of income and capital gains, provided that the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. Charities also are exempt from the value-added tax. The Government has not classified the Church of Scientology as a religious institution and therefore has not granted the organization recognition for charitable status.

At the end of the reporting period, more than 30 percent of state schools had a religious character. Nearly all of the approximately 7,000 "faith schools" in England (numbers are not available for Scotland and Wales) are associated with Christian denominations, although there are Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, (and one Hindu) schools. The first state-supported Hindu school opened in September 2008. In addition, several hundred independent schools of a religious nature receive no state support but must meet government quality standards. Controversy arose in 2006 over 100 Islamic schools when an Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) evaluation of these schools showed many were "little more than places where the Koran was recited." The schools were given time to correct their deficiencies. A review is due in 2010. In April 2009 the Government mandated that all schools teach sex education ("Personal, Social, and Health Education"), but allowed faith schools to teach their pupils their faiths' teachings that some aspects of the standard curriculum is wrong. Some Christian faith schools also faced controversy because

they were accused of not following the national curriculum in science, teaching creationism instead. During the reporting period, the Government issued a new admissions code as a result of its finding that many religious school's had improperly screened children for admission and were not following an "open" admission policy as required by law, thereby denying admission to both special needs children and those outside the faith of the school administrators. The Catholic Church and the Church of England have an agreement to voluntarily accept up to 25 percent of places for pupils from another religious group or no religious group.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. More than 90 percent of students attended schools that were either predominantly Protestant (state run) or Catholic. Integrated schools served approximately 7 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily chose this option, often after overcoming significant obstacles to provide the resources to start a new school and demonstrate its sustainability for three years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools outweighed the limited number of places available. There were more than 50 integrated schools, and the Government permits existing schools to petition to change from state-run or Catholic to integrated status. More petition for that status than are granted it.

The law requires religious education for all children, ages three to 19, in publicly maintained schools. In England and Wales it forms part of the core curriculum in accordance with the Education Reform Act of 1988. In Scotland religious education of some sort is mandated by the Education Act of 1980. However, the shape and content of religious instruction throughout the country is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabuses are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabuses must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils. Schools with a religious designation follow a syllabus drawn up by the school governors according to the trust deed of the school. All parents have the legal right to request that their children not participate in religious education.

Daily collective prayer or worship of "a wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" is practiced in schools in England and Wales, a requirement that may be waived for students who obtain permission of the school authorities. The Education and Inspections Act of 2006 permits sixth form students (generally 16-to-19-year-olds) to withdraw themselves from worship without their parents' permission or action. This law does not exempt sixth form students from religious

education classes. Non-Christian worship is permitted with approval of the authorities. Teachers have the right not to participate in collective worship, without prejudice, unless they work for a faith school. In 2009 the National Union of Teachers called on the Government to end the requirement for a collective act of worship.

After several controversial court decisions prohibiting full-face veils in school (but not headscarves) and the wearing of a Christian chastity ring, the Department of Education provided guidance that advises schools to "... act reasonably in accommodating religious requirements," under human rights legislation. Some Muslim groups, including the Islamic Human Rights Commission, said it was inappropriate for the Government to provide guidance that regulated Muslim communities in matters concerning the expression of their religious beliefs. But it is also legally possible under the act, according to the guidance, to have a school uniform policy that "restricts the freedom of pupils to manifest their religion" on the grounds of health and safety and the "protection of the rights and freedoms of others." The Government's guidance is meant to remind "head teachers" to act with a degree of sensitivity when considering decisions that will impact the cultural complexion of their communities.

In Northern Ireland the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious groups. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than ten employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every three years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. In addition, the 1998 Northern Ireland Act stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity, including on the basis of religious belief. Each public authority must report its plans to promote equality to the Equality Commission, which is to review such plans every five years. In the rest of the country, the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature.

It is government policy to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religious beliefs and to accommodate religious practices by government employees whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service

permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. It also provides prisoners with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim chaplains. The Chaplaincy Council monitors policy and practice on matters relating to religious provision. The military generally provides military personnel who are adherents of minority religious groups with chaplains of their faith.

The Race, Cohesion, and Faiths Directorate, of the Department of Communities, is responsible for addressing racism, extremism, and hate, and for promoting interfaith activity in England and Wales. The directorate also works with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, a nondepartmental government body, in pursuing these goals. According to a directorate 2005 policy further elaborated by the Home Secretary in October 2008, the Government can exclude individuals, such as international religious leaders of minority religious groups, from the country on the grounds that they have engaged in unacceptable behavior, including cases where the public expression of religious or other beliefs by that individual is part of the reason for exclusion. The Government defines unacceptable behavior as using any means to express views that foster extremism or hatred.

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB), a body launched by four large Muslim nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to combat extremism, continued to work on reaching out to encourage moderate, nonviolent interpretations of Islam. The board held elections for its executive board on May 10, 2009. Thirty-four of the 50 seats were elected, and the rest were appointed by the four founding organizations. Twenty percent of the board members are Shi'a Muslims and 20 percent are women, both of which are minimums set by MINAB's by-laws.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

As in previous years, Christian groups stated that they had been subjected to more stringent application of rules restricting religion in the public sphere than other groups. There was increasing public concern over the ability of Christians to express their faith in the workplace. A British nurse was suspended after offering to pray for a patient and a Christian Registrar of Marriages lost her case when she refused to officiate for same-sex civil partnerships.

The collective worship policy continued to invite controversy. One head teacher in Sheffield resigned after protests that the collective worship at the school did not respect members of all communities. Parents and students in favor of the law said that it helped students understand the religious orientation of the country and the

society in which they are living. Some students and parents opposed the policy as imposing religion or a particular form of religion on students. A teachers' union called for the Government to remove the collective worship requirement, especially in secular schools.

During the reporting period conflicting rulings by schools, school boards, employment tribunals, and courts on what is and is not permitted dress in schools and places of employment led to controversy and legal challenges.

Some imams in mosques have advocated terrorism and have subsequently been arrested. The Government rearrested radical preacher Abu Qatada, and the House of Lords ruled that he could be deported to Jordan, where he had been convicted in absentia, despite his assertion that his trial had been unfair and he might face torture.

On April 29, 2009, the British Sikh Police Association began operations to represent the approximately 2,000 Sikhs who work in various capacities in police forces in Britain. It noted that Sikh police officers have not been allowed to participate in certain firearms police units because police helmets do not fit over the turbans Sikhs must wear as part of their religion. Sikhs are also not allowed to work in the field in fire departments because of their turbans and beards. Representatives of Sikh NGOs say they were continuing to work with the authorities to try to come to arrangements that would allow them to work.

On April 8, 2009, police arrested 12 men in northwest England on suspicion of involvement in a major terrorist plot. They were held for varying lengths of time up to two weeks and their apartments were searched. All 12 were eventually released without charge. According to news reports, 11 of the 12 were non-British citizens and could face deportation. Government sources stated that the arrests were based on information about terrorism. Human rights groups and Muslim groups noted that government figures released in May 2009 show that two-thirds of those arrested for terrorism-related offenses are never charged and only about 7 percent of prosecutions are successful. They pointed to this as evidence of a policy of rounding up Muslims in terrorism-related investigations in a discriminatory way.

Members of the Muslim community complained that police targeted them for suspicion, arrest, and "stop-and-search" disproportionately. Ministry of Justice figures showed that the number of stop and searches were significantly higher for blacks and Asians than whites. Because ethnicity and religion in the UK are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic

or religious intolerance. The Muslim community and human rights activists also criticized the 28-day detention powers for terrorism suspects. The Government proposed extending this period to 42 days, but the House of Lords voted against the proposal and the Government withdrew it.

Several studies have shown that Muslims suffer serious discrimination from both authorities and societal actors. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) continued to work closely with Muslim groups to address concerns about the way police treated Muslims. National and regional forums were a key element of this effort. The IPCC publicized its services among Asian communities via advertisements, community meetings, and media articles.

On May 8, 2009, a British high court ruled against a Hindu who wanted to have an open funeral pyre. The judge stated that according to the Cremation Act of 1902 and subsequent 2008 regulations, it is a criminal offense to burn human remains other than in a crematorium. The petitioner has said he planned to continue appealing the case. The Hindu community supported the petitioner's case but also proposed a compromise solution that would allow the spirit of the ceremony to be preserved but comply with the regulations.

In March 2009 a Pakistani man brought a case to court to object to his children being placed with a non-Muslim foster family. The court ruled that because the children were in physical danger, their safety was more important than religious considerations.

On February 11, 2009, the Employment Appeals Tribunal ruled against an appeal by a man who claimed he had been inappropriately fired from his job as a social worker for religious reasons. The court stated that the employer had made a judgment based on the employee's inappropriate proselytizing rather than his belief. The Appeals Tribunal did not agree that inappropriate proselytizing had occurred; however, it did not find that discrimination had occurred, since proselytizing was a valid grounds for termination of employment. The employee was not reinstated to his job, however, because the employer had also provided reasons for the dismissal not related to religion, and the court found these reasons valid.

On January 21, 2009, a bill was introduced in Parliament that would end the ban on the monarch marrying a Catholic, as well as end the practice of male primogeniture in royal succession. The bill would not remove the requirement that the monarch be part of the Church of England. The bill was due to be taken up again in October

2009. A 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities. Twenty-six senior bishops of the Anglican Church are given places in the House of Lords as representatives of the official church. Besides this instance, however, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents, except perhaps in the case of non-residents of the country who wish to marry in the country, a policy which was under review. The Home Office requires nonresidents wishing to marry in the country to apply for a Certificate of Approval (COA) if they are not going to marry in the Church of England. Nonresidents marrying in the Church of England do not have to apply for the COA currently. At least one suit has been brought claiming that the Church of England's exemption from the COA requirement (and the substantial accompanying fee) is discriminatory. COA fees were suspended as of April 2009.

The North London Borough of Islington disciplined and threatened to dismiss Lillian Ladele for refusing to perform marriages for same-sex couples. Ladele stated that she would not perform such duties because of her strongly held religious beliefs. On December 19, 2008, the Employment Appeals Tribunal ruled in favor of the Islington Council and held that no discrimination had taken place.

On November 20, 2008, Nadia Eweida, a Christian, lost her case in an employment tribunal, which found in favor of her employer, British Airways (BA). In 2006 Eweida was instructed not to wear a visible cross while on duty. She refused and was put on unpaid leave. BA's policy at the time dictated that jewelry had to be concealed beneath the wearer's clothing unless it was mandatory according to a particular religion and could not be otherwise be concealed, such as a hijab, turban, or skullcap. The tribunal upheld the previous ruling that the policy was evenly applied, so no discrimination occurred. Eweida and her supporters maintained that she was discriminated against because employees of other religions were allowed to wear religious items. According to the court decision, Eweida acknowledged that the cross was a personal expression of her faith rather than a religious obligation. The court ruled that "there was no evidence that a group of Christians were put at a particular religious disadvantage when compared with non-Christians."

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the Government continued to prohibit religious groups from holding a national sound broadcasting license, a public teletext license, an additional television service license, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

According to a 1999 decision of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, a quasi-judicial, independent body established by law as the regulator and registrar for charities, the Church of Scientology does not fall within the charity law definition of a religious group. The Church of Scientology has not exercised its right of appeal. As a result, Scientology chapels do not qualify as places of worship, and Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion, which affects their legal rights regarding visas and immigration. The Prison Service does not recognize Scientology as a religious group for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers, although prisoners who are registered as Scientologists may practice their religious beliefs and have access to a representative of the Church of Scientology. Ministers of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church of Reverend Moon are not issued visas as ministers, since their organizations are not accepted as religious groups. Adherents and those wishing to learn about either group may apply for visas as visitors or students, respectively. There were no reports of specific visa denials during the reporting period. The Unification Church held a large event in London in November 2008.

In June 2009 an appeals court declared that a Jewish faith school had violated racial discrimination laws, overturning a July 2008 ruling. The earlier ruling had declared that it was the school's right to determine whether or not a prospective student was Jewish by faith. The June 2009 ruling did not strike down this point but determined that this case was one of racial discrimination and was therefore unlawful. On March 8, 2008, the school was sued by the father of a boy who was denied admission because he was insufficiently Jewish (his mother was born a Catholic). The lawsuit accused the school of discrimination, since other students came from families who were "born Jewish" but who either did not practice their faith or were atheists, while his family practiced regularly. The Government is a party to the lawsuit since, in addition to it being a state-supported school, the United Synagogue has the Government's authority to determine the "Jewishness" of applicants.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 15, 2009, a school decided to allow a 16-year-old Sikh girl to wear a kirpan (a Sikh ceremonial dagger that all Sikhs must wear) while taking her exams. Several days previously the school had said she would not be able to take the exams while wearing the kirpan. According to news reports the dispute was resolved amicably.

On May 11, 2009, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) announced that Aqil Ahmed, a Muslim, would become the head of its religious programming division. The BBC made the decision to appoint Ahmed despite a great deal of controversy and criticism from members of the public and some religious groups.

On May 1, 2009, the Scottish Government announced it would provide more than \$132,000 (£80,000) for the delivery of 152 Islamophobia workshops in secondary schools across Scotland over the next two years.

In April 2009 the Government mandated sex education for all state schools in England. This provoked concern from students and parents who disagree on religious grounds with various elements of the national sex education curriculum. The Government's new policy allows teachers at faith schools to give their faiths' perspectives on certain elements of the curriculum, such as premarital sex and homosexuality. Parents also have the right to withdraw their children from such classes if they find them to be in discord with their religious views.

On March 24, 2009, the Government launched The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism (also known as CONTEST 2). The strategy included an emphasis on working with Muslim groups to combat extremism and to improve relations between Muslims, the Government, and society in general. This built on a project announced by the Communities Ministry's announcement in July 2008 of a program to counter extremism by establishing an independent board of Muslim theological experts, teaching citizenship in mosques, and creating a new group of community leaders to provide advice on combating extremism.

In March 2009 Babar Ahmad won a civil case against the Metropolitan police and was awarded \$99,000 (£60,000) in damages. He had been arrested in 2003, and the High Court found he had been subjected to violence and religious abuse. He remained in detention because of terrorism concerns.

On March 8, 2009, two British soldiers were killed in Northern Ireland. The "Real IRA" claimed responsibility. As evidence that the reconciliation between

Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland is continuing, Catholic leaders Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams strongly condemned the attack and publicly declared their support for the Northern Ireland police in trying to apprehend the perpetrators.

In March 2009 the Schools Secretary called for a survey of the "moral values" of faith schools in the wake of Ofsted and NGO reports that said some independent faith schools were not in compliance with 2003 regulations mandating that schools teach their children to be tolerant and live in harmony within British society.

In February 2009 the Government implemented a new School Admissions Code. The code mandates that schools consult with the local community on the impact of the school and how its admissions policy affects the community in which it is located. It also allows state-financed faith schools to give preference to students of a particular faith only if the school is oversubscribed. The new policy came partly as a response to complaints that religious schools were violating the admissions codes at significantly higher rates than other schools. The code was scheduled to be implemented for the 2010 school year.

In January 2009 a Christian nurse was suspended from duty after offering to pray for a sick patient. Shortly thereafter her employer reinstated her after determining she had not tried to proselytize.

British Catholic Bishop Richard Williamson had his excommunication lifted by Pope Benedict XVI. However, Williamson's views denying the Holocaust subsequently were publicized shortly thereafter. The Catholic Church in England and Wales condemned his views on the Holocaust.

In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics were underrepresented in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Since 1999 ongoing government-mandated measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI has increased this proportion. Northern Ireland's Security Minister informed Parliament in March 2009 that the percentage of Catholics in the police forces had reached 26 percent, the highest since a 2001 effort to balance the forces. He also reported that Catholics continued to join the police forces in Northern Ireland despite fears that they might become targets for the Real IRA ("Irish Republican Army") or the Continuity IRA.

In February 2009, according to press reports, the University of Hertfordshire allowed a student time off to celebrate a Wicca religious festival.

On January 10, 2009, the BBC allowed an atheist to give the first atheist "Thought for the Afternoon" on BBC Radio 4. The radio slot had previously been reserved for religious-themed commentary only. The BBC still has not allowed an atheist to speak during its "Thought for the Morning" slot.

On January 4, 2009, there was an attempted arson at a synagogue in North London. There were also numerous incidents of anti-Semitic graffiti, hate mail, and verbal and physical assaults. In response, a group of prominent British Muslims issued a statement condemning the anti-Semitic acts.

The Government held a two-day conference on anti-Semitism in November 2008. It brought together officials from 40 countries and resulted in the publishing of the London Declaration on Combating Antisemitism, which calls for the EU Council of Ministers to address the issue, to expose and isolate governments and politicians who engage in anti-Semitism, and to create a taskforce to monitor and combat racism and anti-Semitism on the Internet.

The Employment Appeals Tribunal ruled on October 24, 2008, that two Hindu employees of an immigration advice center had been unfairly dismissed on the basis of their religion by members of the Ravidasi faith.

On October 21, 2008, private citizens began an atheist bus advertising campaign in response to evangelical Christian advertisements on buses. The campaign bought ads for hundreds of buses around the country. It drew a great deal of publicity and criticism. At least one bus driver refused to drive in a bus with a pro-atheist advertisement. The Advertising Standards Authority cleared the campaign, stating that it was "unlikely to mislead or offend."

On October 6, 2008, the Metropolitan police began an inquiry into race and faith issues in the police force. The report was due in June 2009.

The Anglican Church undertook a contentious debate around the possibility of ordaining female bishops. In July 2008 and February 2009, the General Synod took actions that started the process of ordaining women. However, before the law is passed it must still go through a series of amendments, a process that may take several years. Opponents of ordination for women complained that their concerns had not been taken into account.

A court began investigating a claim of misconduct against a teacher affiliated with the British National Party who may have used his laptop to spread religious intolerance on the Internet between February and March 2007.

In October and November 2008 Muslim and Jewish MPs undertook a university tour on behalf of the Coexistence Trust, an organization that aims at promoting good relations between Muslims and Jews.

In October 2008 the Home Secretary issued a revised set of rules allowing the country to bar entry to foreign preachers who espouse hatred. Muslim groups said the policy was disproportionately aimed at Muslims. On May 5, 2009, the Home Secretary issued a list of people banned under the policy. It included a number of Muslims as well as a number of non-Muslims, including non-Muslim religious activists deemed to have extreme views.

On September 15, 2008, the first state-supported Hindu school opened in London.

In September 2008 Tarique Ghaffur, the third-ranking official at the Metropolitan Police Department, brought a suit against the Metropolitan Police Chief. He alleged racial, religious, and age discrimination. The case was settled out of court in October 2008.

On August 28, 2008, a court convicted a Shi'a Muslim of child cruelty for forcing two youths to flog themselves at a religious ceremony.

On July 29, 2008, a high court judge ruled that a state school in Wales had broken the law when it denied a Sikh girl the right to wear a Kara bracelet on the grounds that the school does not permit jewelry. The Law Lords, the country's highest court, had previously ruled that Sikh children could wear turbans and ceremonial trousers to school. A specific ruling on Kara bracelets and kirpans had not been made by the end of the reporting period, although a Sikh NGO reported that it was working with the Government on developing such a policy.

Lord Chief Justice Phillips, Britain's highest judge, publicly addressed the subject of Shari'a in the country in a speech on July 3, 2008. The Archbishop of Canterbury had caused controversy in February 2008 by stating that the incorporation of some elements of Shari'a into British Common Law was inevitable. Lord Phillips stated that Shari'a could be used in areas such as dispute mediation, marriage, and finance, with the understanding that it could only be used insofar as it did not contradict the laws of England and Wales. A British think

tank, Civitas, reported that as of June 2009, 85 unauthorized Shari'a courts were operating in the country. Civitas argued that these courts often contradict British law.

The Cambridge Muslim College opened during the reporting period. Its stated aim is to educate the country's Muslims and imams in a way that will better improve their understanding of Islam and how to work constructively within society. As noted previously, there has been criticism that many Muslim religious leaders active in UK mosques and schools are predominantly immigrants and lack the background to help the country's Muslims integrate successfully in society.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

There was an outbreak of anti-Semitic incidents in January and February following the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Community Security Trust (CST) a group that has tracked anti-Semitic incidents since 1984, reported that there were 609 anti-Semitic incidents in the first six months of 2009, whereas the preceding 12 months had seen 544 incidents. There were 286 incidents in January and 111 in February, both of which were higher than the previous record of 105 from October of 2000. Anti-Semitic incidents continued to be higher than the previous year in March, but by April or May the rate of incidents had roughly returned to previous levels. The incidents included property damage, threats, abusive behavior, mass-produced or mass-mailed anti-Semitic literature.

CST reported two incidents of extreme violence in May 2009. In one case a man was injured in a knife attack characterized by the police as anti-Semitic. In another case an elderly Jewish man riding an electronic mobility scooter was rammed by a driver who shouted anti-Semitic insults. The victim was thrown from his seat and onto the ground.

In February 2009 London's Royal Court Theatre performed a play entitled *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza*, which caused significant controversy due to its content. Many critics labeled the play as anti-Semitic. The playwright defended the play as being critical of Israeli policy rather than an attack on Jews.

On January 4, 2009, a synagogue was attacked in northwest London in an act of attempted arson.

In January 2009 unknown assailants physically attacked Michael Bookatz, hospitalizing him. Bookatz, who dressed in a way that identified him as Jewish, was apparently chosen randomly. Bookatz stated that the attackers shouted they were attacking him because of Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip.

In June 2008 in a previously unreported event, a Jewish man was killed in Manchester. The attacker had delusions of being persecuted by Jewish people and was confined to a psychiatric hospital.

On May 24, 2009, a Catholic man was beaten to death by a group of Protestants. Police were treating the killing as sectarian and investigations were ongoing. Data released by the police in Northern Ireland in May 2009 show that there were 1,595 sectarian incidents reported to the police in 2008-09, with 1,584 reports for the previous year.

On May 10, 2009, prisoners in a jail in Nottinghamshire constructed a bomb and placed it in a Muslim worship area. Prison officials removed the bomb before it exploded.

On May 5, 2009, an Islamic Centre in Bedfordshire was gutted by fire; police suspected arson. There were unconfirmed media reports that the attack may have been an attempt at retribution against Muslim protesters who demonstrated against British soldiers returning from deployment in Muslim-majority countries. However, investigations were ongoing. On May 25, 2009, a crowd in Luton demonstrated against the Muslims who had protested the British soldiers. Nine persons were arrested.

In March 2009 a Scottish man was brought to court after threatening to blow up a mosque and behead Muslims. He pled guilty and was awaiting sentencing.

In March 2009 the leader of a small political party was convicted of shouting verbal abuse at Muslims and given a suspended sentence. He had previously been convicted of distributing racist literature.

Several documentaries and undercover investigations by the media asserted that extremist preaching was taking place at mosques in the country. A Quilliam Foundation survey concluded that most mosques in the country were out of touch with society because 97 percent of imams were not from the country or citizens, 44

percent conducted Friday sermons in a language other than English, and almost half did not have facilities for women.

On December 17, 2008, according to local newspaper reports, vandals defaced a mosque (recently converted from a church) in Southend and attacked the imam's home.

On December 3, 2008, a Muslim woman won \$123,000 (£75,000) from a senior staff member at the firm where she worked. The senior staff member had discriminated against her and made offensive, religiously based comments.

On November 29, 2008, soccer fans from Newcastle shouted anti-Muslim slogans at an opposition player. The player stated that this was the second year in a row he had been subjected to anti-Muslim chants and that the Football Association had not taken appropriate action in the previous year.

In November 2008 the Beatbullying Charity published a study that said one in four children had been bullied because of his or her faith.

On October 24, 2008, in Crawley, a man was given a one-year sentence suspended for two years plus fines and given community service for a religiously motivated verbal attack on a taxi driver, whom he called "Bin Laden."

On September 29, 2008, approximately 40 Muslim graves were vandalized at a cemetery in the London suburb of Southall.

Police arrested three men in September for firebombing the Gibson House publishing company, which was going to publish a novel of historical fiction about the Prophet Muhammad's wife Aisha. Several publishers had declined to publish the book already for fear of offending Muslims. The book had not been published in the UK by the end of the reporting period.

Newspapers reported that in August 2008 a Muslim student from Qatar was killed in an attack that police were treating as racially and religiously motivated. Three men were arrested in the attack, and one of them was set to stand trial for manslaughter in 2009.

On August 30, 2008, arsonists burned a Lincoln church that was undergoing conversion into a mosque.

In a previously unreported ruling, a London employment tribunal ordered a salon owner to pay \$6,600 (£4,000) in compensation to Bushra Noah. Noah claimed religious discrimination and said the salon owner had not hired her because of her Islamic headscarf.

Plans for Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic missionary group, to build a very large mosque in East London near the site of the 2012 Olympic site led to public criticism, and the project was on hold as of the end of the reporting period.

A study by the Center for Social Cohesion released in 2008 stated that 32 percent of Muslims on British university campuses support killing in the name of religion. Critics of the study noted that the phrasing of the questions skewed the results. Cambridge University did a contrasting study that suggested that only a small percentage of Muslim students hold extremist views.

According to the CST, there were 541 anti-Semitic incidents in 2008, 4 percent fewer than the previous year, but the third-highest since CST began recording incidents in 1984. January 2009 saw the highest monthly total CST has ever recorded, with more than 200 incidents, and there were more than 100 incidents in February 2009. CST stated it was likely this sharp surge in incidents was related to the then on-going conflict in the Gaza Strip. Incident levels dropped to their historical rates by the end of March.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy encouraged interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. Representatives from various ecumenical groups, such as the Three Faiths Forum, and other groups promoting religious tolerance, are routinely included in embassy events. Embassy and consulate officers regularly contacted religious leaders of various groups to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officials actively engaged in "outreach" presentations to the public, with a particular focus on Muslim communities. Embassy officers discussed the need for religious tolerance and the role of religious diversity in American life.

In Northern Ireland long-standing matters related to national identity have been part of political and economic friction between Protestant and Catholic communities. As an active supporter of the peace process, the U.S. Government

encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between the two communities.

URUGUAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 68,039 square miles and a population of 3.2 million (according to the 2004 census). The most recent (2007) statistics on religious preference from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicate that 45.1 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholics, 10.5 percent as non-Catholic Christians, 0.7 percent as Afro-Umbandistas, 0.4 percent as Jewish, and 27.8 percent believe in God but do not claim a religious affiliation. Some religious groups dispute the accuracy of the NBS statistics, and other groups are not reflected in the survey.

Mainstream Protestants include primarily Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other groups include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, Christian Scientists, Salvation Army, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Evangelicals estimate that they have 200,000 followers (6 percent of the population), Afro-Umbandistas at least 100,000 (3 percent), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) 100,000 members (3 percent), and the Jewish community approximately 25,000 (0.7 percent). The estimated 4,000 Baha'is are concentrated primarily in Montevideo. Approximately 850 families practice Buddhism. The Unification Church is active and has major property holdings, including a daily newspaper. An Islamic cultural representative estimated that there are 300 to 400 Muslims. In 2008 the Egyptian Islamic Center in Montevideo, which is supported by the Egyptian Embassy, was inaugurated as

the first mosque in the country. Muslims also gather to pray at the Uruguay Islamic Center in Canelones.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion. The Penal Code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Discrimination, created in 2007, ensures government compliance with the laws, and representatives from several religious groups are active participants. Some religious leaders stated that the Government, in its efforts to protect freedom of speech and expression, fails to control slanderous speech.

There is strict separation of church and state. In April 2009 MERCOSUR held a two-day roundtable discussion with more than 80 local religious leaders to discuss challenges of religious expression in a secular state. The declarations from the meeting recommended greater inclusion of religious groups by the Government in education, government, and culture.

Religious groups are entitled to tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and no group reported difficulties. To receive tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It then applies to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and may grant religious status. The group must reapply every five years. Once the Ministry grants religious status, the group can request an exemption each year from the taxing authority, which is usually the municipal government.

The Government observes Three Kings' Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Muslims may obtain an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and allows them to leave work early on Fridays, and employers generally respected this practice.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private religious schools, primarily Catholic and Jewish.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Christian-Jewish Council met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant denominations met regularly among themselves and with the Catholic Church. There were several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that promoted interfaith understanding.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy staff met with human rights and religious NGOs, including B'nai Brith and the Central Jewish Committee of Uruguay. They also met with leaders of religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Protestant groups, and Afro-Umbandistas.

UZBEKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, the 1998 Religion Law restricts many rights only to registered religious groups and limits which groups may register. Violators of the law's prohibitions on activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction are subject to criminal penalties.

Despite an improved atmosphere in most Muslim communities in recent years, respect for religious freedom declined in several areas during the reporting period. The number of individuals imprisoned for membership in extremist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) appeared to decrease for the second year in a row; however, the Government appeared to shift its focus to Nur, a Turkish Muslim group, arresting at least 42 alleged Nur members and sentencing many of them to prison terms ranging from six to 12 years. The Government did not interfere with worshippers at sanctioned mosques and permitted the operation of other religious groups it considered mainstream. Some minority religious groups remained unregistered because they were unable to satisfy the strict registration requirements set out by the law. These groups, particularly those perceived as engaging in proselytism, experienced raids, harassment, and the detention of their leaders and members; some faced criminal charges.

Uzbek society is generally tolerant of religious groups, and religious groups are generally tolerant of each other. Neighbors, family, and employers sometimes pressure ethnic Uzbek Christians, however, especially recent converts and residents of smaller communities. Some minority religious groups face continued negative media coverage, as well.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy remained engaged in monitoring and promoting religious freedom and maintained contact with government and religious leaders and human rights activists. On January 16, 2009, the Secretary of State re-designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 172,742 square miles and a population of 28.2 million. International experts believe that between two and three million Uzbeks have migrated, many seasonally, to find work in neighboring countries, particularly Russia and Kazakhstan. However, this trend was expected to decrease in 2009 due to the region's slowing economy. Approximately 80 percent of the population is ethnic Uzbek, 5.5 percent Russian, 5 percent Tajik, 3 percent Kazakh, 2.5 percent Karakalpak, and 1.5 percent Tatar.

No official statistics exist on membership in religious groups; however, an estimated 90 percent of the population is nominally Sunni Muslim, of the Hanafi school. Shi'a Muslims, who are concentrated in the provinces of Bukhara and Samarkand, constitute an estimated 1 percent of the population. Approximately 5 percent is Russian Orthodox, a percentage that declines as ethnic Russians and other Slavs continue to emigrate. The remaining 3 percent includes small communities of Roman Catholics, Korean Christians, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Hare Krishnas, as well as atheists. In addition, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain, concentrated in the cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. At least 80,000 Jews emigrated to Israel and the United States over the past two decades, mainly for economic reasons.

As of May 15, 2008, the Government had registered 2,228 religious congregations and organizations--an increase of 1 from the 2,227 recorded in May 2007. Mosques, Muslim educational institutions, and Islamic centers accounted for 2,048 of the total, an increase of two. Among the Muslim groups were several Shi'a congregations. The number of registered Christian groups decreased by one. The 180 registered minority religious groups included 58 Korean Christian, 36 Russian Orthodox, 23 Baptist, 21 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 10 Seventh-day Adventist, eight Jewish, five Roman Catholic, six Baha'i, three Lutheran, four "New Apostolic," two Armenian Apostolic, one Jehovah's Witnesses, one Krishna Consciousness group, one Temple of Buddha, and one Christian "Voice of God" Church. In addition, there were a number of unregistered religious groups. The Government did not provide updated information for 2009.

A growing percentage of Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents actively practice their religion. Outside Tashkent, practicing Muslims outnumber nonpracticing Muslims. In the past few years, mosque attendance has increased, particularly among younger men, who constitute the majority of worshipers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government and laws restrict these rights in practice. The Constitution also establishes the principle of separation of church and state. The Government prohibits religious groups from forming political parties and social movements.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (1998 Religion Law) provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law grants those rights only to registered groups. It also restricts religious rights that are judged to be in conflict with national security, prohibits proselytizing, bans religious subjects in public schools, prohibits the private teaching of religious principles, and requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. The Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), a government agency accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers, must approve all religious literature.

The 1998 Religion Law requires all religious groups to register and provides strict and burdensome criteria for registration. Among its requirements, the law stipulates that each group must present a list of at least 100 citizen members to the local branch of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The CRA oversees registered religious activity.

The law prohibits religious groups from training religious personnel if the group does not have a registered central administrative body. Registration of a central body requires registered religious groups in eight of the 13 provinces, an impossible requirement for most minority religious groups. There are six such entities that may legally train religious personnel. The law limits religious instruction to officially sanctioned religious schools and state-approved instructors. The law permits no private religious instruction and provides for fines for violations. The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in public schools. Article 14 of the Religion Law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" (religious clothing) in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations."

The Criminal and Civil Codes contain stiff penalties for violating the Religion Law and other statutes on religious activities. In addition to the prohibited activities that include organizing an illegal religious group, the law also proscribes

persuading others to join such a group and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal.

The Criminal Code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those that are not registered properly, and "prohibited" groups viewed as extremist, which the Government bans altogether. The code makes it a criminal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison, to organize an illegal religious group or to resume the activities of such a group after it has been denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition, the code punishes participation in such a group with up to three years in prison. The code also provides penalties of up to 20 years in prison for "organizing or participating" in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups.

The main laws under which authorities charge citizens for religious activity are article 159 (anticonstitutional activity); article 216 (illegal establishment of public associations or religious organizations); article 216, section 2 (violation of legislation on religious organizations, including proselytism); article 244, section 1 (production and distribution of materials that create a threat to public security and public order); and article 244, section 2 (establishment, direction of, or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist, or other banned organizations) of the Criminal Code.

December 2005 amendments to both the Criminal Code (article 217, section 2) and Administrative Code (article 201) raised fines for repeated offenses of violations of the law on religious activity to 200 to 300 times the minimum monthly wage of \$19 (28,040 soums) under the Criminal Code and 50 to 100 times the minimum wage under the Administrative Code.

Authorities also use four provisions of the Administrative Code to impose administrative penalties for violations of laws regulating religious activities. Article 201 of the Administrative Code imposes fines on violators of the law on how religious organizations should operate as well as for holding illegal public rallies, marches, and demonstrations. Article 202 imposes fines for "creating the conditions" for holding unsanctioned meetings. Article 240 of the Administrative Code imposes administrative fines for violating the Religion Law, and article 241 imposes fines for "teaching religious doctrines without specialist religious education and without the permission of an agency of the central administration of a religious organization, and equally teaching religious doctrines in a private capacity."

June 2006 amendments to the Administrative Code punish "illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of materials of religious content," with a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for individuals, or 50 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for officials of organizations, together with confiscation of the materials and the "corresponding means of producing and distributing them." Criminal Code article 244, section 3, addresses the same offense, punishing those already convicted under the corresponding article of the Administrative Code with a fine of 100 to 200 times the minimum monthly wage or corrective labor of up to three years. Other changes introduced simultaneously to the Criminal and Administrative Codes punish those convicted of the production and distribution of "literature promoting racial and religious hatred."

Although the law treats all centrally registered religious denominations equally, the Government funds an Islamic university and the preservation of Islamic historic sites. The Government provided logistical support for selected Muslims to participate in the December 2008 Hajj, but pilgrims pay their own expenses. The Government controls the Muftiate, which in turn controls the Islamic hierarchy, the content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials. The Kurbon Hayit and Roza Hayit Islamic holy days are observed as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were significant governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the reporting period. The Government, by continuing to deny registration to some religious groups, effectively deprived them of their legal right to worship, as provided for in the Constitution. The Government restricted many religious practices and activities, punishing some citizens because they engaged in religious practices in violation of registration laws.

The Government bans Islamic organizations it deems extremist and criminalizes membership in them. Chief among the banned organizations are Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), Akromiya, Tabligh Jamaat, Nur, and groups the Government broadly labeled "Wahhabi." The Government states that it does not consider repression of persons or groups suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but rather of preventing armed resistance to the Government.

HT is an extremist Islamist political organization motivated by a socioreligious ideology. Its literature lays out a three-stage campaign for the establishment of a

worldwide Islamic Caliphate. Although HT maintains that it is nonviolent, it has repeatedly praised or justified acts of armed jihad and instances of terrorism. Its literature strongly suggests that the organization might at some point resort to armed action. The party's virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature and websites call for the overthrow of secular governments, including those in Central Asia. Authorities' actions to suppress HT and prosecute its members are based on the group's political activity and are not a restriction on religious freedom per se. However, convictions of individuals associated with HT and similar organizations have lacked due process and have also involved credible allegations of torture. Chief among those targeted for prosecution during the reporting period were relatives and associates of individuals already imprisoned for membership in HT.

The Government has repressed and prosecuted members of "Akromiya" (Akromiylar) since 1997. Religious experts claim that Akromiya is an informal association that promotes business along the lines of Islamic religious principles, while the Government claims that the group is a branch or splinter of HT and that it attempted, with the terrorist group the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), to overthrow the Government through armed rebellion in Andijon in May 2005.

Tabligh Jamoat, an Islamic missionary group with origins in South Asia, follows worship, dress, and grooming practices based on practices from the time of the Prophet Muhammad; its members claim to be exclusively religious and apolitical.

Nur was founded by Kurdish Mullah Said Nursi after World War I and promoted the adoption of Shari'a (Islamic law) in Turkey. In recent years, Nur has become associated with the religious and Pan-Turkish ideology of Turkish scholar Fethullah Gullen, who resides in the United States. After the Central Asian states gained independence, Gullen supported the opening of Turkish high schools throughout Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. Nur's publications were freely available in Uzbekistan in the 1990s. The Turkish schools continue to operate elsewhere in Central Asia, but authorities forced the Uzbek Turkish schools to close in 1999 following a series of bombings in Tashkent blamed on a former Uzbek opposition figure who was living in Turkey at the time. In the same year, the Government harassed and imprisoned some Nur members in a general crackdown on independent Muslim activity.

During the reporting period, authorities initiated a widespread crackdown on suspected Nur members, leading to dozens of arrests and imprisonments. The Uzbek Religious Affairs Committee (RAC) listed Nur as a banned religious

organization. Outside the country, views of Nur's ideology range from progressive to conservative; the group has consistently condemned violent extremism.

The RAC also bans alleged "Wahhabists," a term the Government uses to describe Muslims whose intellectual or religious roots derive from the strict teachings of prominent imams of the early 1990s. Imams Nazarov, Parpiev, and Mirzaev are among these. Nazarov was granted political asylum abroad; the others disappeared in custody. The Government remains deeply suspicious of Muslims who worship outside state-approved institutions, who were educated at madrassahs abroad, or who are tied to known "Wahhabi" imams.

The RAC also bans as extremist eight lesser-known religiously-based organizations. In addition, the Government bans participation in terrorist organizations, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU).

New mosques continued to face difficulties gaining registration, as did those that reapplied after previously being closed. Several mosques in the southern and eastern Ferghana Valley that had reported registration problems in past years remained unregistered despite having the required number of congregants. A number of unofficial, independent mosques were allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams. Authorities also permitted the activities of an unregistered kanaka (Sufi monastery) in the Ferghana Valley town of Kokand. The Government from time to time promoted Sufism, particularly the native Naqshbandi order, as an alternative to what it perceived as extreme forms of Islam imported from abroad.

Minority religious groups continued to have difficulties registering in the reporting period. The Jehovah's Witnesses applied for registration at local, regional, and national levels and received either a denial or no official answer during the period covered by this report. Since 1996, the Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to register congregations in Tashkent on at least 23 separate occasions and to register congregations in the provinces on 13 separate occasions. Of the several Jehovah's Witnesses groups in the country, only one, in Chirchik, had registration status at the end of the reporting period.

In October 2008, the Tashkent City Justice Department, citing technicalities, rejected the latest application for registration from the Eskhol Full Gospel Church in Tashkent. The Church was earlier denied registration on July 22, 2008, after the Tashkent City Justice Department rejected letters of support the Church had

procured from the Chilanzar district Hokimiyat (administration) and the mahalla (neighborhood) committee, claiming that the letters did not "correspond to official requirements." Authorities had denied registration to the Church on three previous occasions.

No Baptist church has successfully registered in the country since 1999. In 2006, the Baptist Union Church in Urgench in Khorezm Province was stripped of its registration. Baptist Union Churches in Gulistan in Syrdarya Province and in Gazalkent, Krasnogorsk, and Toy Tepa in Tashkent Province have attempted to register several times in the past few years without success.

Other churches remained unregistered after unsuccessful past efforts to register. These include Bethany Baptist Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek District of Tashkent; the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik; Emmanuel Church and Mir (Peace) Church of Nukus, Karakalpakstan; Hushkhabar Church in Gulistan; the Pentecostal Church in Andijon; and the Adventist Church, Greater Grace Christian Church, and Miral Protestant Church, all in Samarkand.

There was no update in the case of the Grace Presbyterian Church of Tashkent, which was stripped of its registration in 2007 and ceased regular worship in 2008.

Religious activity remained particularly difficult in Karakalpakstan, as no non-Muslim and non-Orthodox religious communities had official registration status. The last registered Protestant church in Karakalpakstan, Emmanuel Pentecostal Church, lost its registration in 2005. More than 20 Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in the region have been refused legal status, making their activity illegal.

During the reporting period, many churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, did not apply or reapply for registration because they did not expect local officials to register them. Other groups, including those with too few members, reported that they preferred not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that obviously would not meet legal requirements. Some groups did not want to give the authorities a list of their members, especially ethnic Uzbeks, as they were harassed during previous attempts to register. A few groups refused on principle to seek registration because they challenge the Government's right to require it.

To register, a group must report in its charter a valid legal address. In previous reporting periods, local officials denied approval of legal addresses or did not

answer such requests, thus preventing religious groups from registering. The MOJ also cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. Some groups, such as the Tashkent International Church, were reluctant to purchase property without assurance that their registration would be approved. Others claimed that local officials arbitrarily withheld approval of the addresses because they opposed the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members.

Other problems that have prevented registration include claims of falsified congregation lists; problems certifying addresses; improper certification by fire inspectors, sanitation workers, and epidemiologists; grammatical errors in the Uzbek text of a group's charter; and other technicalities.

Ethnic Russians, Jews, and non-Muslim foreigners enjoy greater freedom to choose and change their religion than do members of Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks. Most Christian churches can operate freely as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks.

The private teaching of religious principles and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent is illegal. Only a religious group with a registered central office may legally provide religious instruction.

There are 11 madrassahs (including two for women), which provide secondary education including a full range of secular subjects. The Cabinet of Ministers considers diplomas granted by madrassahs equivalent to other diplomas, enabling graduates of those institutions to continue their education at the university level. In addition, the Islamic Institute and Islamic University in Tashkent provide higher education. The curriculum in the madrassahs and Islamic Institute is oriented toward those planning to become imams or religious teachers. At the government-funded and -established Tashkent Islamic University, students pursue religious studies from a secular perspective, which does not qualify graduates to practice as imams; however, some graduates of the university have been appointed as imams after pursuing a standard sequence of study at a madrassah.

Apart from full-time study in these institutions, there is no officially sanctioned religious instruction for individuals interested in learning about Islam. Two madrassahs in the Ferghana Valley remained closed after the Government converted them into medical facilities in previous years. An increasing number of imams informally offer religious education; although this is technically illegal, local authorities took legal action only in rare instances.

The Government restricts Shi'a Islamic education by not permitting the separate training of Shi'a imams inside the country and not recognizing such education received outside the country. However, Shi'a imams are educated in Sunni madrassahs, which offer some courses in Shi'a jurisprudence. The Russian Orthodox Church operates two monasteries (one for women, one for men) and a seminary and offers Sunday school education through many of its churches. Other religious groups offer religious education through their religious centers. The Jewish community has no rabbinate because it does not have synagogues in eight different provinces and therefore cannot meet the requirements for a registered central office; however, the Jewish school in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy District provides instruction on Jewish culture.

Local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continued to express apprehension over the proselytizing activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. Foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) accused by the Government of proselytizing remained closed, along with most other foreign NGOs. A 2003 decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining a change in registration requirements for NGOs restricted the activities of faith-based entities, and the 1998 Religion Law prohibits "actions aimed at converting believers of one religion into another (proselytizing) as well as any other missionary activity." The MOJ controls accreditation, a necessity for any foreigner attempting to work for an NGO in the country. This control allows the Government to force out, without bringing formal charges, those it believes are proselytizing.

During the reporting period, several expatriate staff members of NGOs were deported for suspected missionary activity. In February 2009, authorities forced the departure of three U.S. citizens associated with the New Hope faith-based humanitarian assistance NGO, which provides medical care to disabled persons in Tashkent. The U.S. citizens were accused of violating unspecified laws and were given two weeks to leave the country. They denied being engaged in missionary activity.

On December 1, 2008, the MOJ re-registered the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which provides humanitarian aid. In April 2008, a ministry official publicly accused the JDC of violating the law and threatened to de-register the organization. There was no update in the case of Rabbi David Gurevich -- a dual American-Israeli citizen and Head Emissary of the Hasidic World Lubavitch Movement -- who was deported in June 2008 after the MOJ refused to renew his accreditation and visa. The Lubavitch synagogue remained

open under another rabbi but without its longtime spiritual leader. Both actions appear to have resulted from factors unrelated to religious freedom.

There was no update in the case of an evangelical church in Samarkand run by South Koreans that lost its accreditation in April 2008 after the MOJ accused it of conducting unauthorized missionary work.

Sources reported that Government instructed mahalla (neighborhood) committees and imams to identify local residents who could potentially become involved in extremist activity or groups, including those who prayed daily or otherwise demonstrated active devotion. The Government controlled the content of imams' sermons and the volume and content of published Islamic materials.

Sources have reported an improved atmosphere in the Muslim community in recent years, with worshippers at many mosques overflowing into the streets for lack of space during Friday prayers. Observant Muslims appeared to be able to display their faith in public more freely. Large numbers of school-age children also were observed attending Friday prayers, although some sources reported that officials were attempting to limit the access of children to mosques.

There were credible reports that the security services continued their covert surveillance of Christian religious communities.

State-controlled media in some cases encouraged prejudice against certain minority religious groups. During the reporting period, state-controlled media accused missionaries of posing a danger to society and equated them with religious extremists. Government officials also held meetings at universities and schools in different regions of the country warning students about the "negative consequences of missionaries and religious extremism."

In March 2009 a documentary aired on state-controlled television titled "The Beam, Leading to Darkness," which focused on Nur. The report described Nur as an extremist sect that aims to establish a pan-Turkic state and claimed its activities "undermine our centuries-old values." The documentary concluded by noting that courts convicted eight individuals of Nur membership on February 16, 2009, and sentenced them to up to eight years in prison.

In February 2009, a documentary aired on Uzbek state-controlled television described Nur as "an extremist sect" that "seeks to establish a pan-Turkic state in Eurasia." The documentary reported that the Government closed Uzbek-Turkish

high schools in Uzbekistan in the late 1990s for allegedly disseminating Nur propaganda and alleged that the schools' graduates resumed Nur's activities in Uzbekistan in 2006. Many of those arrested and imprisoned in the crackdown were Uzbek-Turkish high school graduates.

Although the Government requires that the CRA approve all religious literature, in practice a number of other government entities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), National Security Service (NSS), Customs Service, and police may suppress or confiscate religious literature. The Religion Law restricts the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations, of which seven existed: an interdenominational Bible Society; the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan; two Islamic centers; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices. The Government may confiscate and in some cases destroy illegally imported religious literature.

During the reporting period, the Government restricted the quantity of Christian literature in Uzbek that registered central religious organizations could import. An Uzbekistan Bible Society shipment of approximately 11,000 religious books and brochures--to which the CRA refused to grant importation permission in May 2008, claiming that the Bible Society had not properly notified authorities about the shipment--remained impounded, as did a 2006 shipment of Jehovah's Witnesses literature. Authorities also confiscated, and in some cases destroyed, Christian literature in Uzbek and Russian that had been legally imported. For historical and cultural reasons, evangelical pastors generally preach in Russian while offering limited services in Uzbek, the official national language and the one linked most closely to the majority Muslim population. In previous reporting periods, the CRA allowed some materials, such as limited quantities of Uzbek translations of some books of the Bible, to be imported. The Government requires the Bible Society to file regular reports on its printing, importing, and translating activities.

The International Post Office in Tashkent continued to scrutinize all incoming packages and send examples of any religious material to the CRA for further examination and approval. When the CRA bans the materials, it mails a letter to the intended recipient and the sender explaining the rejection. The CRA has denied entry of both Christian and Muslim titles.

The Government tightly controlled access to Muslim publications and required a statement in every domestic publication (books, pamphlets, compact discs, and

movies) indicating the source of its publication authority. Many books were published with the phrase "permission for this book was granted by the CRA" or "this book is recommended by the CRA," indicating official sanction. Generally, only books published under the Muslim Board's imprint "Movarounnahr" contain these phrases. Other works published under the imprint of the state-owned Sharq or Adolat Publishing Houses do not appear to require CRA approval, even when they deal with Islamic law. A few imported works in Arabic are sometimes available from book dealers. More controversial literature is not displayed, but available only upon request. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremists, or of any literature illegally imported or produced, may lead to arrest and prosecution. The Government categorically prohibited HT leaflets and Nur literature.

The Government limited the number of Hajj pilgrims to 5,000, or approximately 20 percent of the country's allowed number of pilgrims (estimated at approximately 25,000 pilgrims or 1,000 pilgrims for every 1 million of population). An additional 4,000 pilgrims traveled on the Umrah (small Hajj). Local mahalla committees, district administrations, the National Security Service, and the state-run Hajj Commission, which is controlled by the RAC and the Muftiate, were all reportedly involved in vetting potential pilgrims, subject to a blacklist.

While a growing number of government employees attend Friday prayers, they generally display less religious devotion than do citizens in the private sector. The state maintains a policy of secularism, and government employees are careful to maintain the separation between religion and state structures.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to commit serious abuses of religious freedom in its campaign against extremist or independent Islamic organizations. In many cases authorities severely mistreated persons arrested on suspicion of extremism, using torture, beatings, and harsh prison conditions. A significant number of individuals were imprisoned for Nur membership, as the Government apparently shifted its focus from HT to Nur. The total number of individuals convicted for HT membership appeared to drop in the last few years. The Government took a number of administrative steps aimed at eliminating torture in detention. While there were several reports of prison conditions improving for those convicted of religious extremism, abuses continued. Most defendants received sentences ranging from three to 14 years; some received sentences of 16 to 20 years.

In previous reporting periods, sources noted that some prisoners convicted of religious extremism were held separately from "ordinary" prisoners and received harsher treatment from prison guards. In the past two reporting periods, there were several reports that authorities reintegrated religious prisoners with other inmates in several prisons and that conditions had improved at some facilities. There were also reports of inmates convicted of religious extremism dying from tuberculosis (TB) and other diseases.

In November 2008, alleged Akromiya member Khoshimjon Kadirov was arrested in Andijon and transferred to Ministry of Interior custody in Tashkent, where he was reportedly beaten to death.

On February 27, 2009, independent news websites reported that Sohیب Sidikov, who was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment in 1999 on religious extremism charges, died of TB at the Sangorod prison hospital in Tashkent, where he was receiving treatment after being transferred from prison 64/36 in Navoi province. His body was delivered to his family in Kokand on February 23.

On January 30, 2009, an independent activist reported that Abdulatif Ayupov, who was sentenced in 2006 to 11 years' imprisonment for HT membership, died of TB at Sangorod. In September 2008 Ayupov was reportedly transferred from prison 64/36 in Navoi Province for treatment. Ayupov reportedly contracted TB in prison.

On January 22, 2009, independent websites reported the deaths from unknown illnesses of inmates Muhammad Artykov, who was reportedly one of 23 Akromiya businessmen involved in the trial that sparked the 2005 Andijon events, and Abdurahmon Kuchkarov, an alleged participant in the Andijon events.

There were no updates in the following cases of inmates convicted of religious extremism who died under unclear circumstances: the May 2008 case of Odil Azizov and the November 2007 cases of Fitrat Salakhiddinov and Takhir Nurmukhammedov, all of whose relatives reported finding signs of torture on the bodies.

Between August 2008 and the end of the reporting period, at least 16 individuals were imprisoned for Nur membership, and at least 26 other individuals were arrested. Suspected Nur members had been imprisoned before, but never in such numbers. Some of the cases involved allegations of torture and coercion.

In April 2009 the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted three individuals associated with the *Yeti Iqlim* newspaper of membership in Nur. Journalist Davron Tojiev and distributor Shavkat Ismoilov were sentenced to eight years' imprisonment, and Namangan-based imam Mamadali Shahobiddinov received a 12-year sentence.

On March 6, 2009, the independent Harakat.net website reported that four individuals suspected of Nur membership, including Muhammadjon Sobirov, had been arrested in Namangan. Their fate remained unknown at the end of the reporting period.

In February 2009 the independent Ezgulik human rights group reported that 12 suspected Nur members were arrested in Khorezm Province. Their fate remained unknown at the end of the reporting period.

On February 26, 2009, the Tashkent City Criminal Court sentenced five men associated with *Irmoq* magazine -- Bahrom Ibragimov, Davron Kabilov, Ravshanbek Vafojev, U.S. exchange program alumnus Abdulaziz Dadahanov, and Botirbek Eshkuziyev -- to between eight and 12 years' imprisonment for membership in Nur. The defendants reportedly testified in court that they had been tortured in pretrial detention and that evidence against them had been fabricated. On April 1, 2009, the Tashkent City Criminal Court rejected the defendants' appeal. The individuals associated with *Irmoq* were reportedly arrested in August 2008.

On February 17, 2009, Harakat.net reported that Mansurali Arraboev, an instructor at Tashkent's Islamic Institute, was arrested for suspected Nur membership. His fate remained unknown at the end of the reporting period.

On February 16, 2009, a court sentenced eight individuals--Eldor Shermatov, Anvar Sharipov, Jamshid Rasulov, Oktam Bekiyev, Olimjon Musayev, Muzaffar Karimov, Sharofiddin Gofurov, and Bakht Abdugaffarov--to six and one-half to eight years' imprisonment for membership in Nur.

On December 22, 2008, law enforcement officials in Bukhara raided the home of Ikrom Merajov, a university lecturer, and confiscated religious literature. Merajov and eight other men -- Muzaffar Allayorov, Botir Tukhtamuradov, Alisher Jumaev, Abdurahmon Musaev, Bobomurod Sanoev, Jamshid Ramazonov, Salohiddin Kosimov, and Shuhrat Karimov -- were charged with membership in Nur and were in pretrial detention in Bukhara at the end of the reporting period. A few days after

the raid, another unidentified man was reportedly arrested in Bukhara on the same charges. Merajov's arrest was reported in the February 2009 documentary that aired on state-controlled television.

The number of known cases of arrest or detention based on alleged membership in the religious extremist organization HT appeared to decline for the second consecutive year. In an April 2009 report, the Moscow-based Memorial human rights group released a list of 1,452 individuals prosecuted by GOU officials on allegedly politically motivated charges between 2004 and 2008. Nearly 95 percent of them were charged with religious extremism, many for alleged HT membership. The report cited 38 trials involving multiple religious extremism suspects in 2004, 54 in 2005, 43 in 2006, 18 in 2007, and 10 in 2008. It was impossible to verify the number of prisoners in detention for alleged HT membership; estimates from previous reporting periods were as high as 4,500.

There were continued reports that shortly before their release, prisoners convicted of religious extremism were retried for organizing extremist cells within prison or other offenses and had their prison terms extended. There were also a few reports of individuals who were convicted of religious extremism being released upon finishing their sentences.

On March 22, 2009, an independent activist reported that Ruslan Jubathanov, who was originally sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for allegedly disseminating HT literature in 2000, had his sentence extended by another three and one-half years after being convicted in the Navoi criminal court of "insubordination in prison" shortly before he was due to be released. Jubathanov's lawyer was reportedly not informed about the proceedings against his client until after a verdict had been issued.

On January 28, 2009, an independent website reported that prison authorities arbitrarily extended by two years the sentence of Ibrohimjon Umarov, who was imprisoned on religious extremism charges in 1999 and was set to complete his original sentence at the end of 2008. He was then reportedly transferred from Tavaksay prison in Tashkent Province to a prison in Karshi in Kashkadarya Province.

In September 2008, authorities extended by 16 and one-half years the sentence for religious extremism of Habibullah Madmarov, son of Margilan-based human rights activist Akhmadjan Madmarov, after convicting him of forming an extremist conspiracy while in prison in Navoi Province. Several other inmates at the same

prison reportedly had their sentences extended. On June 26, 2009, authorities released another of Madmarov's sons on parole after he completed a seven-year sentence, but one other son and two nephews of Madmarov remained in prison; all were charged with religious extremism.

On April 20, 2009, Mukhsin Mukhsinov, who had been convicted of membership in a "Wahhabi" extremist sect, was released from prison. He reported to the independent Harakat.net website that additional prisoners convicted of religious extremism had also been recently released from prison.

While prisons had special areas set aside for inmates to pray and prison libraries had copies of the Qur'an and the Bible, there were reports that prison authorities did not allow some prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism to practice their religion freely, not permitting inmates to pray five times a day or refusing to adjust work and meal schedules for the Ramadan fast. There were also reports that prisoners were punished for "violating internal prison regulations" by praying at certain times of the day.

On September 26, 2008, the Karakalpak court dropped religious extremism charges against a Protestant from Nukus, Aitmurat Khayburahmanov, who had been arrested and beaten in June 2008 on criminal charges of teaching religion illegally and participating in a "religious extremist" organization.

During the reporting period, at least 31 persons, including 12 women, were imprisoned for HT membership. Several other women received suspended sentences. State-controlled media reported that many other individuals were arrested on charges of HT membership during the reporting period. In some instances, the individuals were reportedly released without charge, but the fate of the majority was unknown. Some cases involved allegations of torture and coercion. Observers were not able to attend all of the trials. At least 11 other persons were imprisoned after being convicted of membership in "Wahhabi" or other religious extremist organizations. It remained unclear how many more cases went unreported.

On February 4, 2009, the Tashkent City Court sentenced three women--Shakhlo Sultanova, Mashkura Manapova, and Gulnora Hakimova--to six years' imprisonment for membership in HT. Eight other women were convicted on the same charge but received three-year suspended sentences. Relatives reported that after Sultanova was arrested in Tashkent in November 2008, she was beaten by police.

On December 28, 2008, the Tashkent City Prosecutor indicted three women for HT membership: Rano Abzalova, Halida Nurmatova, and Dono Gulombekova. An independent activist who monitored their trial reported that the women, who were eventually convicted and received one-year prison terms, testified that they read the Qur'an but denied HT membership. The principal evidence used against them was reportedly the testimony of acquaintances who had already been convicted of HT membership.

Many of those imprisoned for HT membership during the reporting period were relatives or acquaintances of those already imprisoned for HT membership. Many were women, who typically receive shorter prison sentences than men. Women accused of religious extremism were more likely to be given suspended sentences, amnestied, or released without charge--a general practice that applied to women charged with most crimes, not only those accused of religious extremism. During the reporting period, state-controlled media ran articles and broadcast programs specifically warning women about the danger of religious extremism and featuring testimonies from female former religious extremists.

The Government continued to pursue the extradition of suspected Uzbek religious extremists from third countries, particularly from Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine, including those who had sought asylum. During the reporting period, at least two individuals seeking political asylum in Kyrgyzstan were forcibly extradited to Uzbekistan and imprisoned on religious extremism charges.

On February 24, 2009, the Tashkent City Criminal Court sentenced Haitjon Juraboev, a religious extremist suspect whom Kyrgyz authorities extradited to Uzbekistan in September 2008, to 13 years' imprisonment on charges of religious extremism and illegal border crossing. On March 17, the Tashkent Criminal Court rejected Juraboev's appeal. While in Kyrgyzstan, Juraboev was registered as an asylum seeker with the Kyrgyz State Committee for Migration and Employment. Human Rights Watch also reported that Juraboev was granted refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Bishkek. Juraboev is the son-in-law of Obidkhan Alikhanov, an Uzbek imam who was imprisoned on religious extremism charges in the early 1990s.

On September 29, 2008, the Kashkadarya Regional Criminal Court convicted Erkin Kholikov of "Islamic extremism and terrorism" and sentenced him to 20 years' imprisonment. Nine other individuals were convicted and imprisoned in the same trial. In May 2008, the Kyrgyz Government extradited Kholikov, an asylum

seeker who was imprisoned in Kyrgyzstan on charges of illegal border crossing and failing to report a crime.

There were no updates in the numerous cases of individuals convicted of membership in HT and other extremist organizations in previous reporting periods, including the following cases:

The June 2008 sentencing of two women--Ugibi Mizayev and Rano Akhrorkhodzhayeva--to five years' imprisonment for membership in HT, recruitment of HT members, and dissemination of extremist literature.

The February 2008 sentencing of 13 individuals to between 16 and 20 years in prison on charges of membership in a religious extremist organization, with allegations that at least one confession was obtained under duress.

The January 2008 sentencing of Alisher Ubaydullayev to five years' imprisonment for membership in an extremist organization, based on accusations of spreading Wahhabi ideas and on his participation in an antigovernment rally outside the Uzbek embassy in London in 2005.

The December 2007 conviction of three men of membership in Tabligh Jamaat and sentencing of each to between 11 and 14 years in prison.

The October 2007 sentencing of eight men to between three and 10 years' imprisonment for membership in HT. According to human rights activists, police tortured them during pretrial investigation.

The July 2007 sentencing of Dilnoza Tokhtakhodjaeva to three years' imprisonment and six other women to two-year suspended sentences for membership in HT. All of the women were reportedly subjected to psychological pressure and threats.

There were no developments in the following cases from previous years of individuals convicted of membership in HT and other banned religious groups: the April 2007 case of six men in Surkhondarya Province, who were sentenced to between three and six years' imprisonment for membership in a Wahhabi sect and whose confessions were reportedly extracted through torture; the April 2007 case of Gulnora Valijonova, who was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for HT membership based on reportedly insubstantial evidence; the October 2006 case of three defendants in Samarkand who were sentenced to between three and eight

years' imprisonment for HT membership after a trial in which several defendants alleged that their testimony had been coerced through torture; the September 2006 case of seven men sentenced to between 10 and 13 years' imprisonment for HT membership who confessed after allegedly being threatened by authorities; the August 2006 case of 29 men in Tashkent Province who were sentenced to between one and 13 years' imprisonment for HT membership after two separate trials in which several defendants testified that their confessions had been coerced through severe beatings; and the August 2006 case of five men sentenced to between 12 and 15 years' imprisonment in Tashkent in which the men alleged in open court that they had been tortured.

There were no further developments in the case of former Tashkent Imam Rukhitdin Fakhrutdinov, who was sentenced in September 2006 to 17 years in prison on charges of extremism and involvement in the 1999 Tashkent car bombings, or of seven other followers of Imam Abidkhan Nazarov who were sentenced in July 2006 to an average of six years' imprisonment on charges of Islamic extremism.

The Government continued to pressure persons suspected of involvement in the Islamic group Akromiya. There were no further developments in the following cases of individuals convicted of Akromiya membership in previous reporting periods: Anvarjon Mahsadaliyev, charged in December 2007 with membership in Akromiya and complicity in the 2005 Andijon events; Abdumalik Ibragimov, sentenced in February 2007 on charges of membership in Akromiya to eight years' imprisonment; Abdusamat Karimov and Ilkhomjon Yuldoshev, sentenced in July 2006 to eight and five years' imprisonment respectively, or the other members of their group convicted and sentenced at the same time as a group on charges of Akromiya membership.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no credible reports of arrests or harassment of Muslim believers based solely on outward expressions of their religious belief such as beards, veils, or mosque attendance, or of authorities citing religious extremism as a pretext for prosecuting those of moderate religious belief who were not members of banned organizations.

Jehovah's Witnesses came under particular scrutiny and occasionally faced arrest and imprisonment on charges of proselytizing. On July 23, 2008, authorities sentenced two Jehovah's Witnesses from Margilan, Abdubanob Ahmedov and Sergei Ivanov, to four years and three and one-half years' imprisonment respectively for allegedly teaching religion illegally. Courts also gave three-year

suspended sentences to three other Margilan-based Jehovah's Witnesses--Raya Litvinenko, Svetlana Shevchenko, and Aziza Usmanova. In late 2008, an unnamed Jehovah's Witness from Khorezm province also was reportedly convicted on criminal charges of teaching religion illegally, but received a suspended sentence.

On July 8, 2008, a Navoi court fined Jehovah's Witnesses Guldara Artykova and Tursuna Yuldasheva for allegedly refusing to testify in court. On May 30, police in Navoi had come to Artykova's home and detained her and Yuldasheva after seizing religious literature. The women were brought to a police station, where officers beat Yuldasheva, reportedly causing numerous bruises and a concussion. Police released the women the following morning after authorities confiscated their passports.

There were no further developments in the March 2008 fining of Jehovah's Witnesses congregant Abdumannob Ahmedov for conducting a Bible study; the March 2008 sentencing of Mamur Tursunkulov and Nabi Kipchakov to five days' imprisonment and Arslan Suvankulov to three days' imprisonment for illegal religious activity; or the February 2008 fining of Jehovah's Witnesses congregants Elvira Safarova \$71 (93,150 soums) and Yevgeniy Kurbatov \$143 (186,300 soums) for violations of the administrative code related to the illegal teaching of religion.

There was no update in the case of Jehovah's Witness congregant Olim Turayev, who in April 2008 was sentenced in Samarkand to four years' imprisonment on criminal charges of illegally teaching religion and organizing an illegal religious organization.

Irfan Hamidov, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses Samarkand congregation who had been sentenced to two years in a labor camp in May 2007 on charges of illegally teaching religion, was released in May 2009 after completing his sentence and expelled to Tajikistan, his country of citizenship.

Pastor Dmitry Shestakov, leader of a registered Full Gospel Pentecostal congregation, remained in a Navoi labor camp serving a four-year sentence for his 2007 convictions on charges of organizing an illegal religious group, inciting religious hatred, and distributing religious extremist literature. In previous reporting periods, the Government refused to extend amnesty to Shestakov on allegations that he had violated internal prison regulations.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. There were numerous reported instances of police raiding meetings of unregistered congregations and detaining their members. With a few exceptions, authorities charged those detained with unauthorized religious activity such as worshipping, teaching, proselytizing, or possessing unauthorized religious material, and imposed administrative fines of 50 to 100 times the minimum wage. In contrast to previous periods, several individuals were imprisoned for up to 15 days for such offenses during the reporting period.

On April 8, 2009, the Sergeli District Criminal Court raided the home of Pavel Nenno, a deacon of an officially registered Baptist church, in Tashkent and convicted him of violating the Code of Administrative Offences by illegally teaching religion at his home to children and gave him a 15-day prison sentence. Nenno maintained that he was feeding homeless children, not teaching them religion. Eight law enforcement officials raided his home in Tashkent's Sergeli district on March 27, 2009. The court also ordered materials seized from Nenno's home, including Christian books, magazines, posters, films, and a laptop computer, to be destroyed.

On April 3, 2009, a court in the town of Almalyk in Tashkent province found 13 Baptists guilty of proselytism and fined them each 50 times the monthly minimum wage (approximately \$1,000). On March 15, 2009, police from the "antiterrorism" department raided a private home in Almalyk where the Baptists were engaged in a worship service and seized religious literature in Russian and Uzbek. The police were accompanied by a Russian Orthodox priest, who reportedly warned the Baptists not to attend worship services of unregistered churches and urged them to attend his church instead.

On March 3, 2009, the Kurgantepe District Criminal Court in Andijon Province convicted three members of an unregistered Protestant church--Mahmudjon Turdiev, Mahmudjon Boynazarov, and Ravshanjon Bahramov--of illegally teaching religion and sentenced them to 15-day jail terms. Three other church members--Mahmudjon Dehkanbaev, Alisher Shorahmedov, and Murod Rahimov--were detained in a homeless shelter for lack of identification. Rahimov was released on March 6, and Dehkanbaev and Shorahmedov were released on March 13. All of the men had been detained after a March 1 police raid on a private residence.

On October 10, 2008, the Mirabad District Criminal Court in Tashkent convicted seven members of an unregistered Pentecostal church of holding an illegal

religious meeting on October 4 and sentenced them to 15-day prison terms. Five other congregants were fined \$90 (125,200 soums). The court ordered the destruction of religious literature, including Bibles, seized from the Pentecostals. Church members had attempted unsuccessfully on several previous occasions to register.

There was no new information on any of the following cases from the previous reporting period: the June 2008 sentencing of four members of the unregistered Friendship Baptist Church to 10 days' administrative detention and fines of approximately \$32 (42,000 soums) each for organizing illegal religious meetings, violating the Religion Law, and teaching religion illegally; the May 2008 sentencing of members of Navoi's unregistered Baptist Church for holding illegal meetings; the May 2008 sentencing of members of Mubarak's unregistered Baptist church following a March 2008 raid on the church; the April 2008 sentencing of four Seventh-day Adventists from Guliston for holding unregistered meetings in their homes; the \$287 fine (380,000 soums) levied on Baptist Eduard Kim in February 2008 for holding illegal religious meetings, following a raid on a Sunday worship service at his house; or two other reported cases of raids and brief detentions in September and October 2007.

There were no new updates for the following cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses: The March 2008 conviction of Jehovah's Witnesses congregant Abdumannob Ahmedov, who was fined \$280 (372,000 soums) for illegal distribution of religious materials and \$845 (1,117,800 soums) for illegal religious activity; the March 2008 sentencing of Mamur Tursunkulov and Nabi Kipchakov to five days' imprisonment and Arslan Suvankulov to three days' imprisonment for illegal religious activity in Jizzakh; the February 2008 fining of Elvira Safarova \$71 (93,150 soums) and Yevgeniy Kurbatov \$143 (186,300 soums) for several violations of the administrative code related to the illegal teaching of religion; the October 2007 fining of ten congregants \$719 (931,500 soums) for organizing and conducting illegal meetings in Kagan.

Dilafroz Arziyeva, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses Samarkand congregation convicted of illegally teaching religion in June 2007, completed her sentence of two years of corrective labor, after which her wages were no longer deducted and handed to the state.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reported disruptions of the Jehovah's Witnesses annual memorial services commemorating Jesus Christ's death. Jehovah's Witnesses reported making special accommodations during the

memorial to reduce the likelihood of disruptions. Authorities granted a visa to a Jehovah's Witnesses representative from the United States to observe the services on April 9, 2009, but did not issue visas to other foreign Jehovah's Witnesses.

Members of other religious minority faiths, including Hare Krishnas, occasionally faced harassment. Forum 18 reported that on February 7, 2009, police raided a Hare Krishna gathering in Samarkand as devotees were about to celebrate a religious festival, the appearance day of Sri Nityananda. Police detained several of the devotees overnight before releasing them.

In contrast with previous years, there were no cases during the reporting period in which authorities deported members of religious minority groups from the country on the basis of their religious affiliation.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to reduce the likelihood of torture, including for those arrested on alleged religious extremist charges, by transferring authority to issue arrest warrants from prosecutors to the courts (habeas corpus), thereby subjecting law enforcement officials to judicial oversight. In December 2008, the Government also adopted a new law on defense attorneys that codifies defendants' right to remain silent, to call an attorney or relative after arrest, and to meet with their lawyer whenever they wish. However, the Government replaced voluntary bar associations with a government-controlled Chamber of Lawyers that defense attorneys are required to join.

In April 2009 national legislation was amended to allow the Human Rights Ombudsman unfettered access to prisons to monitor conditions. Authorities at pretrial detention facilities, where many abuses reportedly occur, are now required, upon a detainee's request, to arrange a meeting between a detainee and representatives from the Human Rights Ombudsman Office. In 2008, authorities also allowed independent monitors from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for a six-month trial period to conduct prison visits, which had been suspended in December 2004. The trial period ended in September 2008, and the

ICRC submitted a report with its conclusions and recommendations to the Government. Negotiations on the future of ICRC prison visits in Uzbekistan were ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were continued reports of prison conditions improving for those convicted of religious extremism, including reintegration of such individuals into the general inmate population at several prisons across the country. Authorities announced that 10,000 individuals were amnestied in 2008, reducing the prison population to 38,000, an incarceration rate of about 138 prisoners per 100,000 persons. Amnesties reduced prison overcrowding; however, it was unclear how religious prisoners benefited from these amnesties.

The Government also allowed greater religious expression by Muslims. On state-controlled television, there was a noticeable increase in the number of broadcasts on Islam during the reporting period, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. It was more common to see women on the street wearing the hijab than in the previous reporting period, and mosque attendance continued to increase. Former Mufti Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf continued to host a popular radio program on Islam, teach at the Islamic University, and publish widely on a variety of religious topics in both print and electronic formats.

In 2008 authorities agreed to register and allow construction of a new Orthodox church in Khorezm province. Authorities also re-registered the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which distributes humanitarian aid to those in need.

The Government continued to respect the military pacifism of Jehovah's Witnesses, as the draft board routinely gave exemptions. On April 9, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country did not encounter any disruptions during their annual memorial services commemorating Jesus Christ's death.

At least one Protestant was granted amnesty during the reporting period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Society was generally tolerant of religious diversity but not of proselytizing. In particular, Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish leaders reported high levels of acceptance in society. However, some evangelical or Pentecostal Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbek converts encountered difficulties stemming from discrimination. There were persistent reports that

ethnic Uzbeks who converted to Christianity faced discrimination and harassment. State-controlled media in some cases encouraged societal prejudice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and government officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. U.S. State Department officials in Washington, D.C., met on several occasions with embassy officials of the country to convey U.S. interest in expanding religious freedom. U.S. officials traveled to and around the country meeting with religious leaders and groups as well as with government officials. The Ambassador and embassy officials maintained regular contact with the CRA and with religious leaders, including imams, priests, and rabbis; they also regularly discussed religious freedom concerns with educators, journalists, and human rights activists. The Embassy emphasized the importance of religious freedom by including religious leaders in its official events.

When the Embassy learned of difficulties religious groups or faith-based foreign aid organizations faced, it intervened on their behalf where possible, taking such actions as contacting government officials and attending trials. Embassy officials frequently discussed religious freedom cases with diplomatic colleagues to coordinate efforts on monitoring cases and contacting government officials. In November 2008 the Embassy hosted a roundtable with colleagues from other foreign missions and representatives from evangelical Protestant denominations and the Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss issues affecting those communities.

U.S. diplomats monitored Jehovah's Witnesses' worship services in Tashkent on April 9, 2009, to help ensure the congregations' freedom to observe their annual Memorial of Jesus Christ's death.

U.S. officials urged the Government to allow more freedom of religious expression, more mosque registrations, and more amnesties of religious prisoners of conscience, consistently emphasizing that religious tolerance and political security are complementary goals. U.S. officials, both in Washington, D.C., and in Tashkent, pursued negotiations with the Government aimed at amending its laws on religion, including lowering the 100-member minimum required to form a religious group, repealing the ban on proselytizing, lifting restrictions on the importation and publication of religious literature, and eliminating legal provisions prohibiting the private teaching of religion, which the U.S. Government believes is an essential element for preventing further radicalization of young Muslims.

In November 2006 the Secretary of State first designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On January 16, 2009, the Secretary renewed the CPC designation and designated a 180-day waiver to further the purposes of the Act, pursuant to section 407 of the Act, as the Presidential Action in response to the CPC designation while negotiations continued on measures to improve religious freedom.

VANUATU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an archipelago with an area of 4,568 square miles and a population of 235,000. Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian. An estimated 32 percent is Presbyterian, 13 percent Roman Catholic, 13 percent Anglican, and 11 percent Seventh-day Adventist. Groups that together constitute 14 percent include the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, and other Protestant denominations. The John Frum Movement, an indigenous religious group with its own political party, is centered on the island of Tanna and includes approximately 5 percent of the population. The Baha'i Faith, Muslims, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are also active. There are believed to be members of other religious groups within the foreign community; they are free to practice their religions, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies.

Missionaries representing several Western churches brought Christianity to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some foreign missionaries continue this work; however, approximately 90 percent of the clergy of the established churches are now indigenous. As of 2008, SIL International had translated the New Testament into three of the country's indigenous languages.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The preamble of the Constitution refers to a commitment to "traditional Melanesian values, faith in God, and Christian principles." The Constitution also provides for freedom of religion. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, this law is not enforced.

The Government interacts with churches through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Vanuatu Christian Council. Government oaths of office customarily are taken on the Bible. The Government does not provide any funds for construction of churches.

The Government provides grants to church-operated schools and pays teachers' salaries at church-operated schools that have been in existence since the country's independence in 1980. These benefits are not available to the few non-Christian religious schools in the country.

Government schools schedule time each week for religious education conducted by representatives of Council churches, using materials produced by those churches. There is no uniform standard time for religious instructions across all schools; however, the standard curriculum requires that Year 7 through 12 students are allocated one hour a week dedicated to religious instruction. The Education Act allows parents to have their children excused from religious classes. In practice, since the school is responsible for children during the school day, students are required to be in class at all times. Hence, most students attend a class linked to their denomination. Classes emphasize the history and tenets of Christianity and respect for authority.

Aside from the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, use of government resources to support religious activities is typically not condoned (although there is no law prohibiting such support).

The Government does not attempt to control missionary activity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

In rural areas, traditional Melanesian communal decision-making predominates. If a member of a community proposes to introduce a significant change within the community, such as the establishment of a new church, the chief and the rest of the community must agree. If a new church is established without approval, the community views the action as a threat to community solidarity and a gesture of defiance by those who join the new church. However, religious tension generally has been resolved through appeals from traditional leaders to uphold individual rights.

Religious representation at national events is organized through the Vanuatu Christian Council. Ecumenical activities of the Council are limited to the interaction of its members.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Papua New Guinea is also accredited to the Government of Vanuatu. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Papua New Guinea periodically discuss religious freedom issues with the Government and nongovernmental organizations in Vanuatu as part of an overall policy to promote human rights.

VENEZUELA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion on the condition that the practice of a religion does not violate public morality, decency, or public order, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected the practice of religious freedom; however, religious groups, like others that criticized the Government, were subject to harassment and intimidation during the reporting period. There were some efforts by the Government to limit the influence of religious groups in certain geographic, social, and political areas.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic incidents occurred during the reporting period.

The U.S. Government raises religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 352,144 square miles and a population of 28.4 million. According to government estimates, 92 percent of the population is at least nominally Roman Catholic and the remaining 8 percent Protestant, a member of another religion, or atheist. The Venezuelan Evangelical Council estimates that evangelical Protestants constitute 10 percent of the population.

There are small but influential Muslim and Jewish communities. The Muslim community of more than 100,000 consists primarily of persons of Lebanese and Syrian descent living in Nueva Esparta State and the Caracas area. The Jewish community numbers approximately 13,000 and is centered in Caracas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion on the condition that the practice of a religion does not violate public morality, decency, or public order, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in the Ministry of Interior and Justice is charged with maintaining a registry of religious groups, disbursing funds to religious organizations, and promoting awareness and understanding among religious communities. Each group must register with the DJR to have legal status as a religious organization. Requirements for registration are largely administrative, with the additional provision that groups serve the community's social interests. On June 26, 2008, the Reformist Catholic Church of Venezuela announced its formation. Roman Catholic bishops alleged that the Government was funding the new church in an attempt to divide the Roman Catholic Church in the country and promote President Chavez's socialist agenda.

A 1964 concordat governs relations between the Government and the Vatican and provides the basis for government subsidies to the Roman Catholic Church. All registered religious groups are eligible for funding to support religious services, but most money goes to Catholic organizations. The Government continued to provide annual subsidies to Catholic schools and social programs that help the poor, although the subsidies were reduced in some states. The Government continued to fund the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV) at reduced levels. Other religious groups are free to establish their own schools. There were reports of government funding for certain evangelical groups, although much of this was related to social projects implemented via the Government's social programs.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas as national holidays.

Foreign missionaries require special visas. Missionaries expressed concern about refusal rates for first-time religious visas and, less frequently, renewals. Some missionary groups also complained that the religious visa process was prone to delays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected the practice of religious freedom; however, religious groups, like others that criticized the Government, were subject to harassment and intimidation during the reporting period. The Constitution forbids the use of religion to avoid obeying the law or to interfere with the rights of others. There were efforts by the Government to limit the political influence of the Catholic Church and missionary groups in certain geographic and social areas.

Since the December 2006 reelection of President Chavez, leaders from a number of religious groups noted that the Government was less open to dialogue.

During the reporting period leaders within the Catholic Church issued several statements critical of the country's democracy and human rights record. In response, President Chavez and other government officials on multiple occasions publicly criticized specific Catholic bishops and the Papal Nuncio. On April 6, 2009, the CEV issued a critical communiqué warning that the country's democratic system was "at risk of collapse." In response, President Chavez insinuated in his newspaper column that the Catholic Church should be held partially responsible for events surrounding a failed coup attempt in 2002. On April 13, 2009, unknown assailants robbed the Caracas headquarters of the CEV and stole a laptop computer and several computer monitors.

On December 26, 2008, following the Archbishop of Caracas Cardinal Jorge Urosa's criticism of a constitutional amendment that would eliminate term limits, President Chavez called a talk show on a state television network and accused Cardinal Urosa of abusing his position and behaving like a member of the opposition. The following day at an appearance at a public hospital, President Chavez publicly claimed the Cardinal belonged to the "oligarchy" and suggested that the Cardinal was manipulating the public to oppose the February 15, 2009, referendum to eliminate term limits. In January 2009 the CEV issued a communiqué questioning the legality and legitimacy of that referendum.

On October 16, 2008, the CEV issued a statement condemning political polarization in the run-up to November 23, 2008, state and local elections and expressing concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, specifically regarding 26 decree-laws President Chavez had issued on July 31, 2008. Following the release of the CEV statement, the government-backed *Diario Vea* newspaper ran numerous critical editorials against the Catholic bishops.

Following the 2007 decision of the Vatican to grant political asylum to opposition student leader Nixon Moreno, who had sought refuge in the Mission of the Holy See in Caracas, and the subsequent decision of the Government to deny Moreno safe passage out of the country, the Holy See Mission was subjected to sporadic teargas attacks. On January 19 and February 5, 2009, unknown perpetrators threw tear gas canisters at the Holy See Mission. On March 9, 2009, Moreno fled the Holy See Mission in Caracas, reportedly fearing that government supporters would forcefully extricate him from the diplomatic mission. Following Moreno's disappearance, in March 2009 *Diario Vea* featured numerous articles and political

cartoons accusing the Papal Nuncio and the Catholic Church of complicity in Moreno's departure, but did not offer proof.

Government-affiliated media outlets made numerous anti-Semitic statements during the reporting period. The hosts of *La Hojilla*, a pro-Chavez talk show on official government television, made recurring anti-Semitic slurs, and *Diario Vea* regularly published anti-Semitic comments. These media outlets accused rabbis and Jewish businesspersons of conspiring to destabilize the Government and of supporting Israel's military incursion into the Gaza Strip. Government-sponsored media outlets published anti-Jewish caricatures and political cartoons on numerous occasions. The local Jewish community expressed strong concerns that such statements and publications fostered anti-Semitism, creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust of the community. In August 2008 President Chavez met with the country's Jewish leaders and pledged to work with them to combat anti-Semitism, irrespective of world events.

In December 2008 and January 2009 there was a marked increase in anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic graffiti in Caracas and other cities. During the reporting period, the country's Jewish organizations received numerous telephone threats. On January 14, 2009, the Government announced its suspension of diplomatic relations with Israel and simultaneously called on the international community to punish Israeli leaders via the International Criminal Court for military action in Gaza.

The suspension of diplomatic relations further escalated anti-Semitism in the country. During the late night/early morning hours of January 30-31, 2009, armed gunmen vandalized the Tiferet Israel synagogue, the oldest synagogue in Caracas, and held the building for several hours. The attackers ransacked administrative areas and files, and wrote anti-Semitic graffiti on the interior walls. Following a February 4, 2009, meeting between the Confederation of Jewish Associations in Venezuela (CAIV) and Foreign Minister Maduro, government officials publicly condemned the attack. On February 5, President Chavez personally phoned the president of CAIV to condemn the attack and promised to guarantee the safety of the Jewish community. On February 9, 2009, criminal charges were filed against 11 persons alleged to have perpetrated the attack, including several police officers.

The Government continued to prohibit foreign missionary groups from working in indigenous areas. On November 4, 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that the rights of the New Tribes Mission (NTM) to conduct its social programs among indigenous tribes were not violated in 2005 when the Ministry of Interior and

Justice required the NTM to remove its personnel and abandon its property in all indigenous areas in the country. In 1953 the Government granted the NTM permission to conduct social programs among indigenous tribes.

The military chaplain corps consisted almost exclusively of Catholic priests. Although armed forces members of other religious groups were allowed to attend services of their faith, they did not enjoy the same access to clergy. Authorities tightly regulated and limited access of evangelical chaplains to prisons.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Jewish leaders reported numerous incidents throughout the reporting period of anti-Semitism including graffiti, slurs, political cartoons, and media commentary. On June 17, 2009, protestors spray-painted swastikas on the official residence of opposition Governor Capriles of the State of Miranda. On February 26, 2009, unknown assailants threw a small explosive device at a Jewish community center in Caracas. Government officials promised to investigate and pursue those responsible. No suspects had been charged at the end of the reporting period. On January 23, 2009, anti-Semitic banners were displayed in the Parque de las Ballenas in the city of Maracay.

In the weeks prior to the January 30, 2009, attack on the Tiferet Israel synagogue, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared throughout the city of Caracas. On January 8, 2009, vandals spray-painted the exterior of the Tiferet Israel synagogue, and anti-Semitic graffiti began to appear on numerous buildings, monuments, and squares across Caracas; on January 22, 2009, individuals spray-painted additional graffiti.

Non-Jewish religious groups generally experienced fewer problems with societal discrimination, with some notable exceptions. In November 2008 individuals

spray-painted a Catholic Church in Barinas with offensive anti-Catholic and pro-government graffiti. In September 2008 and again in March 2009 thieves broke into the country's largest mosque, the Ibrahim Al-Ibrahim, ransacking the offices and stealing jewelry, computers, and other objects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government raises religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives had only limited access to government officials. Embassy officials maintained close contact with various religious communities. The U.S. Chargé d'Affaires regularly met with religious authorities. On February 4, 2009, during the regular Permanent Council meeting of the Organization of American States, the United States denounced the attack against the Tiferet Israel synagogue.

VIETNAM

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship; however, government restrictions remained on the organized activities of many religious groups.

Respect for religious freedom and practice continued to improve in some regards during the reporting period, though significant problems remained. The Government took further steps to implement its 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and supplemental decrees on religious policy issued in 2005 (collectively, the Government's "legal framework on religion"). The Government also facilitated construction of new training facilities, thus furthering the education of thousands of monks, priests, nuns, and pastors. New congregations were registered in many of the 64 provinces, a number of new religious groups were both recognized and registered at the national level, and the Government generally allowed citizens to practice religion more freely. The Catholic Church, Protestant congregations, and other smaller religious groups reported that their ability to gather and worship improved and that the Government eased restrictions on the assignment of new clergy. The Government also permitted Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants to hold several large-scale religious services throughout the country, with more than 10,000 religious followers participating in each event. The Catholic Church reported the Government approved the establishment of one additional Catholic seminary in Nam Dinh Province. Protestants and Catholics across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitude toward their religion, and in general Protestants and Catholics were allowed to gather for worship without harassment, despite isolated incidents.

During the reporting period, the Government granted national recognition to five Protestant denominations: the Vietnam Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Vietnam Baptist Society (Southern Baptist), the Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace Southern Baptist), the Vietnam Presbyterian Church, and the Vietnam Mennonite Church. The Government also recognized four additional religions: the Bani Muslim Sect, the Threefold Enlightened Truth Path, the Threefold Southern Tradition, and the Baha'i Community. Also during the reporting period, the Government granted national registration certificates to one additional Protestant denomination, the Vietnam Christian Fellowship, as well as two additional religious groups, the Mysterious Fragrance from Precious Mountains and the Four Gratuities.

Despite progress during the reporting period, significant problems remained with the implementation of the legal framework on religion, especially at the provincial and village levels. These included the slow pace, in some cases inaction, of registration of Protestant congregations in the north and the Northwest and Central Highlands; inconsistent application of procedures for the registration of congregations; and other cumbersome legal requirements and restrictions on religious recruitment. In some areas where registration has been slow, Protestant congregations experienced harassment, such as in Tra Vinh Province in the Mekong Delta and isolated areas in the Northwest Highlands. Some provincial authorities were proactive in implementation of the legal framework on religion, some appeared not to consider consistent implementation of the legal framework as a priority, and others, particularly in the Northwest Highlands, refused to implement it. After three years, the central Government has not yet approved a translation of the Bible in H'mong.

The Government maintained a prominent role overseeing officially recognized religions. Religious groups encountered the greatest restrictions when they engaged in activities the Government perceived as a challenge to its rule or to the authority of the Communist Party. The Government continued not to register and to discourage participation in one unrecognized faction of the Hoa Hao Buddhists. The leadership of the unrecognized Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) reported the Government continued to monitor its activities closely and encouraged leaders to restrict their movements. Government authorities released five former Khmer Buddhist monks imprisoned for their alleged involvement in organizing land rights protests in the Mekong Delta in 2007.

There were few instances of societal violence based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period. In April, Protestant lay pastor Thach Thanh No, affiliated with the Vietnam People's Christian Evangelical Fellowship Church (UKCC-VPCEF) in Tra Vinh Province, was killed by Khmer Krom Buddhists after he met with parishioners from his church. There were allegations he was killed because of his faith, although the Government contested this assertion. Many Catholics and Protestants reported Christians are not considered for senior government positions because of unofficial discrimination within the Government.

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City maintain regular dialogue with senior and working-level government officials to advocate for greater religious freedom. U.S. officials met and communicated regularly with religious leaders, including religious activists under government

scrutiny. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. officials, including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, raised concerns about the difficulties religious organizations encountered in obtaining official recognition, problems Protestants faced in the Central and Northwest Highlands, and other restrictions on religious freedom, with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, government cabinet ministers, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders, senior provincial officials, and others. Former Secretary of State Rice, in meetings with government officials during the reporting period, called for continued improvements in religious freedom. Religious freedom also was covered in the 2008 U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 127,000 square miles and a population of 86 million. Some estimates suggest more than half of the population is at least nominally Buddhist. The Roman Catholic Church constitutes 8 to 10 percent. Several Cao Dai organizations constitute 1.5 to 3 percent, the primary Hoa Hao organization 1.5 to 4 percent, Protestant denominations 0.5 to 2 percent, and one Muslim organization less than 0.1 percent of the population. Most other citizens consider themselves nonreligious, although some practice traditional beliefs such as veneration of ancestors and national heroes.

Many Buddhists practice an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism that is sometimes called the "triple religion." The Government Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) cites an estimate of 10 million (12 percent of the population) practicing Mahayana Buddhists, most of whom are members of the ethnic Kinh community (the country's majority group, also referred to as Viet) and found throughout the country, although many consider this a low estimate. There are proportionally fewer Buddhists in certain highland areas, although migration of Kinh to these areas is changing the distribution. In Ho Chi Minh City alone, there are more than 1,000 active Buddhist pagodas. A Khmer ethnic minority in the south practices Theravada Buddhism and has more than 570 pagodas. Numbering more than 1 million, they live almost exclusively in the Mekong Delta.

In 1981 the officially sanctioned Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) was established incorporating all Mahayana, Theravada, and Bhikshu Buddhism under its umbrella. All Buddhist groups within the VBS are proportionally represented throughout the leadership structure and organization. In practice Theravada monks

meet separately to determine issues such as doctrine, education, and other community needs to raise within the VBS.

The Government requires all Buddhist monks, including Khmer Krom monks who practice the Theravada tradition, to be approved by and work under the government-sponsored, officially recognized Buddhist organization, the VBS. The CRA in theory regulates the number of Buddhist student monks, although the number of Buddhist academies at the local and provincial levels, in addition to four university-equivalent academies, has greatly increased in recent years.

Since the Government's merger of all Buddhist organizations into the VBS, the Government does not recognize the legitimacy of the UBCV. There are several newly recognized religious organizations that have Buddhist influences, although they are separate and distinct from the VBS. Of these, the Pure-Land Buddhist Home Practice faith has the largest membership with more than 1.3 million followers.

There are an estimated 8 million Catholics, although government statistics place the number at 6.15 million. Catholics live throughout the country, with the largest concentrations in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City, in parts of the Central Highlands, and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has revived in many areas in recent years, with newly rebuilt or renovated churches and growing numbers of people who want to be religious workers.

Government statistics put the number of Cao Dai at 2.3 million, although Cao Dai officials routinely claim as many as 5 million adherents. Cao Dai groups are most active in Tay Ninh Province, where the Cao Dai "Holy See" is located; in Ho Chi Minh City; and throughout the Mekong Delta. There are separate groups within the Cao Dai religion; the largest is the Tay Ninh sect, which represents more than half of all Cao Dai believers and more than 40 percent of the population of the province. Cao Dai is syncretic, combining elements of many faiths.

According to the Government, there are 1.3 million Hoa Hao followers; affiliated expatriate groups estimate as many as 3 million adherents. Hoa Hao followers are concentrated in the Mekong Delta, particularly in provinces such as An Giang and Dong Thap, where the Hoa Hao were dominant as a social, political, and military force before 1975. The government-recognized Hoa Hao Administrative Committee (HHAC) was organized in 1999. Some Hoa Hao belong to other sects that oppose the HHAC.

The two largest officially recognized Protestant churches are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) and the smaller Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN). The Grace Baptist Church, United World Mission Church, Vietnam Mennonite Church, Vietnam Presbyterian Church, Vietnam Baptist Society (Southern Baptist), and Vietnam Seventh-day Adventist Church also are recognized officially. Other Protestant denominations also are present, including the Vietnam Christian Fellowship (officially registered), as well as others registered locally but not registered on the national level. Estimates of the number of Protestants ranged from government figures of 900,000 to claims by churches of up to 2 million. The strongest growth in Protestant believers occurred from 1996 to 2000. Some new converts belong to unregistered evangelical house churches. Based on adherents' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including minority groups in the Northwest Highlands (H'mong, Dzao, Thai, and others) and in the Central Highlands (Ede, Jarai, and Mnong, among others).

Mosques serving the small Muslim population, estimated at 60,000 to 80,000 persons, operate in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, western An Giang Province, and provinces in the southern coastal area. The Government estimates there are nearly 73,000 Muslim believers. The Muslim community is composed mainly of ethnic Cham, although in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang Province it includes some ethnic Kinh and migrants originally from Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. Approximately 40 percent of Muslims are Sunnis; the remaining 60 percent practice Bani Islam, a type of Islam unique to the ethnic Cham who live on the south-central coast.

There are several smaller religious communities, the largest of which is the Hindu community. Approximately 50,000 ethnic Cham in the south-central coastal area practice a devotional form of Hinduism. Another 4,000 Hindus live in Ho Chi Minh City; some are ethnic Cham, but most are Indian or of mixed Indian-Vietnamese descent.

There are an estimated 7,000 Baha'is, largely concentrated in the south. Baha'i followers were present prior to 1975, but open practice of the Baha'i Faith was banned from 1975 to 1992 and only received national recognition as a new religion in 2008. In May 2009 the Baha'i Faith held its second national convention with representatives from its 73 registered congregations present.

There are approximately 1,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) throughout the country. The Church has two locally recognized congregations in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

At least 50 active congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses operate. A few are registered locally, each reportedly with several hundred members. Many of the congregations are in the south, with at least 10 in Ho Chi Minh City.

There is one Jewish temple in Ho Chi Minh City. While its members are primarily foreign national expatriates, the congregation is growing.

At least 14 million citizens constituting 17 percent or more of the population reportedly do not practice any organized religion. The Government does not categorize those whose activities are limited to visiting pagodas on ceremonial holidays as practicing Buddhists. Using this stricter definition, the number of nonreligious people would be much higher, perhaps as many as 50 million. No statistics were available on the level of participation in formal religious services, but it was generally acknowledged that this number has been increasing since the early 1990s.

Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 14 percent of the population. They historically practice different traditional beliefs than those of the majority Kinh. Increasing numbers of H'mong, Dao, and Jarai in the Northwest and Central Highlands are converting to Protestantism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, legal code, and a 2003 Communist Party Central Committee resolution on religion provide for freedom of belief and worship, as well as non-belief; however, restrictions exist in policy and practice. The 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief serves as the primary document governing religious practice. It reiterates citizens' rights to freedom of belief, freedom of religion, and freedom not to follow a religion, and it affirms that violations of these freedoms are prohibited. It states, however, that the "abuse" of freedom of belief or religion "to undermine the country's peace, independence, and unity" is illegal and also warns that religious activities must be suspended if they negatively affect the cultural traditions of the nation.

The ordinance continues the practice of Government control and oversight of religious organizations. Under its provisions, religious denominations must be officially recognized or registered, and the activities and leadership of individual religious congregations must be approved by "appropriate" lower-level authorities. "Appropriate" authorities must also approve the establishment of seminaries and the organization of and enrollment in religious classes. The naming of priests or other religious officials requires authorities' approval only when a foreign "element," such as the Vatican, is involved. The Ordinance explicitly bans forced renunciations of faith. The Ordinance also relaxes government oversight of religion. For example, religious organizations are required only to inform appropriate authorities of their annual activities or the investiture and transfer of clerics, whereas in the past this required explicit official approval. Further, the Ordinance encourages religious groups to carry out charitable activities in health care and education, which were limited in the past.

The 2005 Prime Minister's "Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism" calls on authorities to facilitate the requests of recognized Protestant denominations to construct churches and to train and appoint pastors. The Instruction directs authorities to help unrecognized denominations register their congregations so they can worship openly and move toward fulfilling the criteria for full recognition. The Instruction directs authorities in the Central and Northwest Highlands to help groups of Protestants register their religious activities and practice in homes or "suitable locations," even if they do not meet the criteria to establish an official congregation. The Instruction also directs local officials to allow unregistered "house churches" to operate so long as they are "committed to follow regulations" and are not affiliated with separatist political movements.

Implementing Decree 22, also issued in 2005, provides further guidance on the Ordinance on Religion and Belief. It delineates specific procedures by which an unrecognized religious organization may register its places of worship, its clerics, and its activities and thus operate openly. It provides procedures for these groups to apply for official recognition from the Government to gain additional rights. The decree specifies that a religious organization must have 20 years of "stable religious operation" in the country to be recognized by the Government and states that past operation in the country can be counted toward this requirement. The decree further defines specific time periods for the Government to consider requests from religious organizations and requires officials to give an organization an explanation in writing for any rejected application.

Decree 22 also clarifies the procedures for religious organizations and individual congregations to seek official recognition. In principle, recognized religious denominations are allowed to open, operate, and refurbish places of worship, train religious leaders, and obtain permission for publication of materials. To obtain official recognition, a denomination must receive national-level registration, which according to the legal framework involves several legal stages. First, the religious organization must apply for and receive registration in each local administrative area in which it operates. Registration requires a religious organization to file information with relevant authorities about its structure, leadership, and activities. Authorities then have 45 days to raise questions or concerns. National-level registrations have a 60-day consideration period. The CRA must issue a license before an organization is considered registered. After maintaining national registration for one year, the eligible religious group may apply for full legal recognition and must receive government approval of its leadership, structure, and activities.

Decree 22 further specifies that appropriate authorities must provide a written response to requests for official recognition within 30, 45, 60, or 90 days, depending on the scope of the request. In the case of a refusal, a specific reason must be included in the written response, although this requirement also does not appear to be consistently followed. There is no specific mechanism for appeal in the Ordinance, nor are the reasons for denying a request restricted in any way.

Decree 22 stipulates that provincial People's Committees must approve the construction of new religious facilities. The renovation or upgrade of religious facilities also requires notification of authorities, although not necessarily a permit, depending on the extent of the renovation. The Decree stipulates that authorities must respond to a construction permit application within 20 days.

The national-level CRA is charged with disseminating information about the new legal framework to authorities at the provincial, district, commune, and village levels and assuring uniform compliance. Implementation of the legal framework at lower levels of the Government continued to be mixed. During the reporting period, national and provincial authorities held a number of training courses for lower-level officials about the new laws to ensure their understanding and compliance with the legal framework.

The Government does not officially favor a particular religion. Virtually all senior government and CPV officials, as well as the majority of National Assembly delegates, are formally "without religion." Many party and government officials

openly practice traditional ancestor worship, however, and some visit Buddhist or Cao Dai pagodas. The CPV claims tens of thousands of the more than three million Communist Party members are religious believers. The prominent traditional position of Buddhism does not adversely affect religious freedom for others, including those who do not practice a religion.

Adherence to a religious faith generally does not seriously disadvantage individuals in nongovernment civil, economic, and secular life, although it likely would prevent advancement to senior CPV or military ranks. The military does not have a chaplaincy. Practitioners of various religious groups serve in local and provincial government positions and are represented in the National Assembly. Some clergy and religious followers are members of the CPV-affiliated mass political and social organization, the Vietnam Fatherland Front. CPV and government officials routinely visit pagodas, temples, and churches, making a special point to send greetings and visit Catholic and Protestant churches over Christmas and Easter.

The Government officially recognizes the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Baha'i, Muslim, Pure Land Buddhist Home Practice, Threefold Southern Tradition, and Threefold Enlightened Truth Path faiths as religious organizations. Individual congregations within each registered or recognized organization established after the legal framework took effect must also be registered. Practitioners of alternative Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups do not participate in government-recognized/registered religious organizations.

The Government allows travel for religious purposes, but the approval of authorities is required for some religious leaders to participate in religious conferences and training courses abroad. Muslims were able to undertake the Hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials were generally able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Catholic leaders regularly travel to the Vatican for consultations. Other unofficial religious leaders regularly travel internationally.

The Government requires all religious publishing to be done by the Religious Publishing House, which is part of the State Publishing House's Office of Religious Affairs, or by other Government-approved publishing houses after the Government first approves the proposed items. From 2006 to 2008, the Religious Publishing House published 1,777 different books and other publications, for a total of 4,511,900 copies. A range of Bibles, Buddhist sacred scriptures, and other religious texts and publications were printed and distributed openly. The Bible is

printed in Vietnamese, Chinese, Ede, Jarai, Banar, M'nong, and English. The Religious Publishing House printed 30,000 copies of the Bible in Bana, Ede, and Giarai ethnic languages between 2006 and 2008.

Article 35 of Decree 22 requires Government approval for foreign missionary groups to proselytize and stipulates that such activities should take place under the sponsorship of a national or local religious organization. It discourages public proselytizing outside recognized worship centers. Some missionaries visited the country despite this official prohibition and carried on informal proselytizing activities.

The Government does not observe any religious national holidays.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; however, it permits clergy to teach at universities in subjects in which they are qualified. Buddhist monks have lectured at the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, the main Communist Party school. Several Catholic nuns and at least one Catholic priest teach at Ho Chi Minh City universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Buddhist groups are allowed to provide religious education to children. Catholic religious education, on weekends or evenings, is permitted in most areas and has increased in recent years in churches throughout the country. Khmer Theravada Buddhists and Cham Muslims regularly hold religious and language classes outside normal classroom hours in their respective pagodas and mosques. Religious groups are not permitted to operate independent schools beyond preschool and kindergarten. Atheism is not officially taught in schools.

Religious affiliation is indicated on citizens' national identification cards and in "family books," which are household identification documents. In practice, many citizens who consider themselves religious do not indicate this on their identification cards, and government statistics list them as nonreligious. Although it is possible to change the entry for religion on national identification cards, many converts find the procedures overly cumbersome or fear government retribution. The Government does not designate religious affiliation in passports.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government requires the registration of all activities by religious groups and uses this requirement to restrict and actively discourage participation in certain

unrecognized religious groups, including the UBCV and some Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups.

Government practices and bureaucratic impediments restricted religious freedom. The constitutional right to freedom of belief and religion continued to be subject to uneven interpretation and protection.

Because of the lack of due process and inconsistent oversight, religious activities can be subject to the discretion of local officials. In some cases local officials reportedly told religious leaders that national laws do not apply to their jurisdictions. In other cases different provinces applied the same laws differently. In certain cases recognized and unrecognized Protestant groups were able to overcome local harassment or to overturn negative local decisions after they appealed to higher-level authorities.

Several hundred ECVN congregations continued to await action on their applications to register. Reasons cited for delays in the process or rejection of applications included bureaucratic impediments such as incorrect procedures or forms or incomplete information. Less frequently, local authorities cited vague security concerns and stated either that their political authority could be threatened or that confrontations could occur between traditional believers and recently converted Christians.

In some provinces house churches were required to submit lists of all worshippers as part of the registration process, although the legal framework on religion does not require this information. This practice appeared to be widespread in the Mekong Delta but also occurred in north-central Thanh Hoa Province. In some cases authorities removed this requirement in response to the protests of the registering groups; in other cases the extra-legal requirement was maintained, slowing down the registration process.

In Dak Lak Province, more than 100 SECV "meeting points" remained unregistered.

Other obstacles to religious growth and training remained. Officially recognized religious groups faced some limitations in obtaining or publishing teaching materials, expanding training facilities, sharing their faith, building new houses of worship, and expanding the number of clergy in religious training in response to increased demand from congregations. The Government continued to ease limitations compared to previous years, however.

There are no formal prohibitions on changing one's religion. The cumbersome process of applying for a new national identification card with the new religion may deter some individuals from converting, however. There were reports that local officials in rural communities continued to discourage conversion to Protestantism by threatening converts with difficulties in applying for identity-related documents or losing education and social welfare allowances.

In June 2009 Ho Chi Minh City airport officials prevented a pastor from traveling to the United States. They confiscated his passport, and ordered him to report to police. In 2008 a house church pastor was also denied a passport.

Government policy does not permit persons who belong to unofficial religious groups to speak publicly about their beliefs, but some continued to conduct religious training and services without harassment. Members of registered religious organizations are permitted to speak about their beliefs and may persuade others to adopt their religions in registered places of worship, but they are generally prohibited from doing so elsewhere. The Government controls and monitors all forms of public assembly, including assembly for religious activities; however, during the reporting period, large religious gatherings were allowed.

As in previous years, the Government opposed efforts by the UBCV to operate charitable activities and continued to restrict the movement of some UBCV leaders, although the UBCV operate many pagodas without restriction. As in previous reporting periods, UBCV leaders reported they were urged to restrict their movements but were able to receive visits from foreign diplomats, see other UBCV members on occasion, and maintain contact with associates overseas; however, these activities were still closely scrutinized. Provincial leaders of the UBCV throughout the southern region reported routine surveillance by local authorities and limited ability to travel and meet with each other because of restrictions. UBCV Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do stated he is allowed to leave his pagoda to visit his doctor once or twice a month and can meet with others outside the pagoda.

The Government continued to monitor and impede the activities of certain religious groups based on their political activism. National security and national solidarity provisions in the Constitution override laws and regulations providing for religious freedom, and these provisions reportedly were used to impede religious gatherings and the spread of religious beliefs to certain ethnic groups.

The Penal Code, as amended in 1997, establishes penalties for vaguely defined offenses such as "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and nonbelievers." The Government continued to limit the organized activities of independent religious groups and of individuals who were regarded as a threat to party authority.

The Government formed and recognized the official Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Administrative Council, in 1999. Several leaders of the Hoa Hao community, including several pre-1975 leaders, openly criticized the committee, claiming it was subservient to the Government. Hoa Hao who did not join the Administrative Council have faced some restrictions on their religious and political activities since 1975, in part because of lingering Communist Party suspicions stemming from the Hoa Hao's armed opposition to communist forces dating back to French colonial rule.

The Government remained concerned that some ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands were operating a self-styled "Dega Church," which reportedly mixes religious practice with political activism and calls for ethnic minority separatism. This complicated the registration process for other churches in the area.

SECV and house churches in the Central provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Binh Phuoc, and Dak Nong continued to experience close government scrutiny because of feared association with separatist groups overseas.

The Religious Publishing House has not yet acted on a longstanding request to allowing printing of the Bible in the H'mong language due to the fact that the Government recognizes an archaic form of the H'mong language that is not in regular use today and cannot be read by the average H'mong.

The Government allows, and in some cases encourages, links between officially recognized religious bodies and coreligionists overseas; however, the Government discourages contacts between the UBCV and its foreign Buddhist supporters. Contacts between some unregistered Protestant groups and their foreign supporters are sometimes discouraged but occur regularly, including training, and provision of financial support and religious materials. The Government remained critical of contact between separatist "Dega" Protestants in the Central Highlands and overseas supporters.

Specific challenges included unresolved property claims with virtually all churches including the Catholic Church, SECV, and ECVN. Provincial authorities have

returned a limited number of properties confiscated from religious organizations after 1975 and remained in protracted discussions on others. Many properties seized were schools and hospitals later incorporated into the state system.

The country's history, and its recent rapid economic development, complicate land issues. As in the case of the former Papal Nuncio site in Hanoi, there are claims by both Buddhists and Catholics because land once home to Buddhist pagodas was given to the Catholic Church during the French colonial period. Land is a valuable commodity, and the Government prioritizes rapid economic development. Religious leaders increasingly reported their land disputes were matters of economic rather than religious discrimination.

While the Government and the Catholic Church agreed to the return of one property in 2008, the status of many other properties remained unresolved. In June 2009 a Catholic monastery on disputed property belonging to the Brothers of the Holy Family in Long Xuyen, An Giang Province, was torn down.

In Quang Binh Province in February 2009, the bishop of the Vinh diocese celebrated Mass at the disputed ruins of the Tam Toa Church, which had been bombed in 1968. The provincial government seized the church in 1996 and converted it to a war memorial to "preserve and protect for future generations the memory of American War Crimes." On October 23, 2008, the bishop had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with provincial officials recognizing the historic value of the church and agreed to a land swap in exchange for suitable replacement property. When local authorities offered five parcels of land to build a new church, however, the diocese rejected the properties as not of comparable worth.

In January 2009 a disputed Catholic property in Vinh Long, the convent of the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Paul of Chartre, was torn down and converted into a public park.

Large-scale protests occurred in Hanoi, with as many as 15,000 Catholic parishioners attending a special Mass and prayer vigil conducted by the Archbishop of Hanoi on September 21, 2008, as the result of an ongoing property dispute over the residence of the former Papal Nuncio in Hanoi, which the Government confiscated. On September 19, city officials had announced they would turn the site into a public park, with the former Papal Nuncio's home becoming a library. City officials immediately began demolishing administrative buildings at the site.

Between January and September 2008, Catholic parishioners held large prayer vigils over disputed land the Thai Ha parish previously owned in Hanoi. Eight persons were arrested in August and September. In December they were sentenced to time served for destroying public property and disturbing public order.

Protestants also faced land rights issues. On March 11, 2009, provincial and district officials informed SECV leadership in Dak Lak that they would demolish a church on disputed property in Buon Me Thuot City. This church was the last Protestant building of the ethnic Ede people in the area and had been confiscated after 1975. The local government already had built a school in the yard and wanted to replace the main church building with a kindergarten. The SECV objected and called the Ministry of Public Security and the national CRA. National Communist Party officials justified their actions stating the church had housed weapons and propaganda advocating an independent Dega state.

Recognized Protestant organizations obtained a small number of previously confiscated properties, but other disputes continued. The SECV sought restitution for more than 250 properties; other denominations active in the south pre-1975 also had claims. In December 2008, in Cu Hat Commune in Dak Lak Province, local authorities and police razed a prayer house affiliated with the Good News Mission Church. The church had not received a building permit, and ownership of the land was in dispute. Police reportedly injured five parishioners during the razing of the church. Parishioners then constructed a temporary prayer house, again without a permit. Church leaders reported the church had not experienced difficulties prior to construction of the first prayer house.

Although the Ordinance on Religion and Belief encourages religious organizations to conduct charitable activities in education and health care, the degree of government oversight of these activities varied greatly among localities. In some areas, especially in the south, Catholic priests and nuns operated kindergartens, orphanages, vocational training centers, and clinics and engaged in a variety of other humanitarian projects. Operating without a legal basis, however, has created some difficulties for the Church. One shelter was unable to obtain legal birth records and public school enrollment for the children under its care. Charitable activities religious groups undertook in northern Vietnam were more restricted, despite some northern provinces reportedly becoming more permissive during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of abuses of religious freedom continued to diminish; however, some religious believers continued to experience harassment or repression, particularly those who had not applied for or been granted legal sanction. In a number of instances, local officials forced church gatherings to cease, closed unregistered house churches, and pressured individuals to renounce their religious beliefs.

The dissemination of the legal framework on religion remained an uneven process, especially in the North and Northwest Highlands. Many pastors and priests reported that police and other authorities had not implemented fully these revised legal codes. Some Protestants in these areas reported that local officials used legal pretexts to prevent or complicate registration.

Congregations in Tien Giang province continued to report difficulties during Christmas celebrations. Some were denied permits to hold services, while others obtained permits limiting attendance by non-local pastors and followers.

Assembly of God followers in Dien Bien District, Nong Luong Commune complained of harassment from local officials and inability to register their congregation despite repeated attempts since 2005. They were prohibited from holding Christmas or Easter services and from having ethnic H'mong attend, although they continued to hold weekly services and conducted charitable activities.

Catholics in Son La City faced regular harassment by local officials and police and were prohibited from holding Christmas Mass. Local officials also barred a visiting priest from holding Easter services, and only allowed him to pray with congregants.

Some ethnic minority worshippers in the Central Highlands--particularly in areas suspected to be affiliated with the "Dega Church"--continued to be prevented from gathering to worship. The number of reported incidents was significantly lower than in previous reporting periods and appeared to reflect individual local bias rather than central government policy. In some instances the local officials involved apologized and were reprimanded or fired.

As in previous years, there were indications that provincial officials rebuked local authorities for harassing house churches in contravention of the Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism. In a few incidents in Tra Vinh Province, local authorities reportedly harassed groups that submitted registration applications. Other Protestant churches in Quang Ngai, Long An, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai

also reported low-level difficulties from local officials after submitting church registration applications.

On June 29, 2009 a dispute at the Bat Nha Pagoda in Lam Dong Province between monks affiliated with the Plum Village (Lang Mai) order led by French-based Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and monks affiliated with the VBS became violent after local officials permitted the chief monk of the pagoda affiliated with the VBS to cut off power and water supplies to the Plum Village order. A large mob of angry VBS monks and local thugs stormed the Plum Village facilities, burned the homes of nuns, destroyed many of the Lang Mai facilities, and beat several monks. According to eyewitness accounts, police made no effort to stop the destruction, although they prevented the crowd from entering the common area in a dormitory where Lang Mai monks and nuns sought refuge. The standoff continued for several days. Two weeks later, provincial and central VBS leadership pressured the Bat Nha Pagoda chief monk to allow the Plum Village order to remain temporarily; however, as of the end of the reporting period the Plum Village order remained without power and water.

Inter-Evangelistic Movement (IEM) followers continued to report difficulties in several locations in Dien Bien Province, where police in past years actively broke up meetings of worshippers and local authorities refused to register IEM meeting points and pressured followers to abandon their faith. In June 2009 lay pastors and parishioners in Dien Bien Dong District, Pu Nhi Commune, reported being summoned, harassed, and beaten by local police. In February 2009 IEM leaders reported the detention of a pastor-in-training in Pu Nhi Commune of Dien Bien Dong District. Sung A So, a student of an IEM-affiliated Bible school in Ho Chi Minh City, was detained for "illegal evangelizing" and fined \$114 (VND 2 million), later reduced to reduced to \$29 (VND 500,000).

Twice in June 2009 police raided congregations affiliated with the Agape Baptist Church in the Ong Dinh Commune of Hung Yen Province. They beat two pastors and forced parishioners to go to police headquarters. Earlier in May 2009, one of these pastors was detained several hours after the deputy police chief disrupted services of his house church and confiscated Bibles. Authorities threatened to charge him with resisting arrest and conducting illegal services.

Also in May 2009 Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, a Vietnam People's Christian Evangelical Fellowship Church (UKCC-VPCEF) leader in Gia Lai, alleged he was detained for 12 days at a police "guest house" where he was questioned and accused of abusing religious freedoms in an effort to conduct political activities.

On April 5, 2009, echoing previous incidents of violence against Khmer ethnic minority Protestants in Tra Vinh Province by fellow Khmer, a Protestant lay pastor affiliated with the Church UKCC-VPCEF in Tra Vinh Province was killed allegedly by other members of the Khmer ethnic minority due to his Protestant faith. The Government claimed the individual involved was not a religious believer and stated he died in a traffic accident, but several other sources confirmed that he was a lay pastor and had been beaten to death due to his Protestant evangelizing. Some reports alleged the violence has been instigated by local Buddhist leaders and sanctioned by local officials. Virtually all Protestants throughout the province experienced harassment and difficulties in holding services.

In April 2009 a local leader of the unregistered Hoa Hao Buddhist Church in Dong Thap Province was fined US \$23 (VND 400,000) for "illegal evangelizing" for setting up a Hoa Hao altar at her home on Founder Disappearance Day. On March 21, 2009, while marking Founder Disappearance Day, followers of the unregistered Hoa Hao Buddhist Church in An Giang and Dong Thap Provinces reported police harassment and surveillance. Police visited the homes of followers, instructing them to "pray for a peaceful nation" but discouraging them from meeting with other followers. In November 2008 police searched the home of a local leader of the faith and confiscated computers, a printer, and a video camera, accusing him of illegally pirating VCDs involving the teachings of the unregistered Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. He was fined US \$229 (VND 4 million). In October 2008 police attempted to prevent followers of the unregistered Hoa Hao Buddhist Church in Long Hung B Commune from commemorating a death anniversary. In August 2008 followers of the unregistered Hoa Hao Buddhist Church were again impeded from marking a death anniversary in Vinh Thanh Commune, Lap Vo District, Dong Thap Province. The CRA asserted some Hoa Hao followers were convicted for violating regulations prohibiting this activity.

In February 2009 in Ha Giang Province it was alleged that Lau Nhia Po killed his mother, Va Thi Tho, after her conversion to Christianity. The day after his release in April 2009 he killed another Christian in Sung Can Village, Sung Tra Commune, Meo Vac District. Local authorities allegedly took no further action in response to the killings. According to the Committee for Religious Affairs, Po had a dispute with his mother, at which time she fell and died four days later. The CRA claimed district police investigated the case and did not have sufficient basis to try Po for killing his mother.

In early January 2009 ECVN leaders in Lao Cai Province reported local officials in the Ban Me Commune told Protestants to renounce their faith or face fines.

In December 2008 local officials from Lai Chau Province, Nam Kha Hamlet, Nam Han Commune, Sin Ho District, pressured a lay deacon and 32 Protestant families to renounce their faith, according to church officials.

In November 2008 local officials from Ha Giang Province, Lung Cang Hamlet, Minh Ngoc Commune, Bac Me District, threatened to fine congregants US \$3 (VND 50,000) and deacons US \$29 (VND 500,000) each if they continued meeting.

There were reports of continued harassment of the Full Gospel Church in Thanh Hoa Province in the fall of 2008. In December 2008 local officials attempted to disperse a joint Protestant Christmas gathering of approximately 600 congregants in Thanh Hoa Province at a hotel in downtown Thanh Hoa city but eventually allowed the service to continue.

The UGOC leadership reported that in southern Long An Province many continued to avoid house churches following incidents of harassment from local officials in November 2007 and April 2008.

In Sa Thay District, Kontum Province an SECV Church was prohibited from holding Christmas services. In July 2008 district and commune officials in Sa Thay threatened to deny social benefits to those who did not renounce their faith and also confiscated religious materials.

Despite recent improvements, some members of the Full Gospel Church in Hieu Tu Commune of Tieu Can District, Tra Vinh, alleged local government agencies, such as the Women's Union and hunger-elimination and poverty-relief related agencies, continued to deny services to Protestants or asked followers to renounce their faith as a precondition for assistance.

The Community Gospel Church of Vietnam in Thanh An Commune, Binh Long District was prohibited from holding Christmas services, although other congregations in the province experienced no difficulties at Christmas.

In the Central Highlands, SECV congregations in some districts of Dak Lak Province stated registration of new meeting points continued to be slow. In

November 2008 a Protestant house church in Dak Lak Province agreed to the request of local authorities to stop running a live-in Bible school for lay pastors.

Catholic priest Pham Van Loi continued to live under conditions resembling house arrest reportedly for reasons related primarily to his political beliefs or attempts to form political organizations, despite the apparent lack of any official charges against him. The CRA asserted that Father Loi was not under house arrest and that the Government did not restrict his religious activities. The movement of a number of other UBCV, Cao Dai, Catholic, Hoa Hao, and Protestant dignitaries and believers was occasionally restricted or monitored by police.

In May 2008, on the day of Buddha's birthday celebration, a senior officer from the provincial police came to the UBCV-affiliated Phuoc Hue Pagoda in Quang Tri Province and apologized for earlier harassment in April 2008. At the end of the reporting period, the head monk, Thich Tu Giao, had not received compensation for the alleged April 2008 confiscation of a computer, a digital camera, a cell phone, and approximately US \$6,300 (VND 112 million). The CRA claimed that the chief monk illegally expanded the pagoda onto land owned by another individual and that local officials twice ordered the monk to dismantle the portion of the pagoda that had been illegally constructed. According to CRA, because Thich Tu Giao did not respond to official requests, police were ordered to dismantle the illegally constructed part of the pagoda but did not take any money or other items in the possession of Thich Tu Giao.

In April 2008 Monk Thich Tri Khai was reportedly expelled from Giac Hai Pagoda, Don Duong District, Lam Dong Province by local authorities, who then raided the pagoda and changed the locks. Local police and Vietnam Fatherland Front officials allegedly organized local Buddhists and citizens to publicly denounce Monk Khai in advance of his expulsion. Two UBCV monks attempting to visit Khai were detained and questioned by police. The CRA claimed that in a decision of the Lam Dong Provincial VBS Executive committee, Monk Thich Tri Khai was expelled from the Giac Hai pagoda for sending a letter to the Committee in November 2007 asserting to be the deputy representative of the UBCV in Lam Dong. Some sources at the pagoda reported Monk Thich Tri Khai may have sought medical treatment at a relative's home, but this was not confirmed. CRA claimed it did not know the location of Monk Thich Tri Khai.

During the reporting period, the Government released five ethnic Khmer monks who in 2007 had been defrocked in Cambodia and deported to Vietnam. The monks had been and sentenced to one year in prison for "sabotaging national

unity" under Article 87 of the Penal Code in connection with their alleged participation in land rights protests. Two of the monks were released in June and November 2008 and the remaining three in January 2009.

Forced Religious Conversion

Decree 22 states, "Acts to force citizens to follow a religion or renounce their faith...are not allowed." The Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism contains a similarly worded statement. Although Government officials stated forced conversions or renunciation of faith had always been illegal, these were the first legal documents to state so explicitly. Religious contacts from the Central and Northwest Highlands reported attempted forced renunciations continued to decrease. A few incidents were reported during the period covered by this report in central Kontum Province, Southern Tra Vinh Province, and Northern Dien Bien and Lao Cai Provinces.

Local officials in several northwestern villages continued to attempt to convince or force H'mong Protestants to recant their faith. Local authorities encouraged clan elders to pressure members of their extended families to cease practicing Christianity and to return to traditional practices.

In early 2009 ECVN leaders reported repeated efforts by local officials to pressure Protestants from Ban Me Commune, Si Ma Cai District in Lao Cai Province, to renounce their faith. On three occasions in January and February, local officials reportedly came to talk to Protestants, confiscated religious materials, and threatened to fine them unless they renounced their faith.

In August 2008 members of the Protestant Life Gospel Church in the Duyen Hai District of Tra Vinh Province were similarly threatened with reduction in social benefits if they did not renounce their faith.

In July 2008 Protestants affiliated with an SECV Church in the Sa Thay District of Kontum Province were pressured to renounce their faith or face a cut in social benefits from the Government. Also in July 2008 in Sa Thay District, a member of the Christ Gospel house church was threatened that his son would be expelled from university if he did not renounce his faith.

In July 2008 a lay pastor affiliated with the IEM Church in Dien Bien Province, Dien Bien Dong District, Pu Nhi Commune, was pressured to renounce his faith by the Commune's People's Committee Chairman.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Improvements in respect for religious freedom continued during the reporting period. In many areas Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai, as well as the Government, reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Compared to previous reporting periods, the Government continued to ease restrictions placed upon most religious groups and greatly expanded the number of religions that received national recognition. Much of the change came from continued strengthening in the implementation of revisions to the legal framework governing religion instituted in 2004 and 2005, as well as a more positive government attitude toward Protestant groups. Many recognized and unrecognized religious groups, especially Protestant groups in the Central and Northwest Highlands, reported that the situation for their practitioners continued to improve overall.

Thousands of new church leaders--Catholic, Buddhist and Protestant--were trained with Government sanction. In addition, the central Government continued to train, inform, and encourage provincial and local authorities to comply with regulations under the legal framework on religion. Nonetheless, implementation of the legal framework remained inconsistent.

During the reporting period, the Government permitted large religious gatherings, such as Catholic celebrations at the La Vang Catholic sanctuary, the funeral of Cardinal Tung in Hanoi where more than 5,000 participated, Christmas celebrations in Danang with 3,000 participants, and a large celebration of more than 10,000 for Vesak Day at a stadium in Ho Chi Minh City. Traditional pilgrimage events such as the Hung Kings' Festival, Buddhist ceremonies in Hue, and the Hoa Hao Founding Day and commemoration of the founder's death also occurred without incident. Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi officials also facilitated large Christmas and Easter celebrations by a variety of Christian denominations.

In April 2009 more than 15,000 Protestants gathered at the Tao Dan Stadium in Ho Chi Minh City to celebrate Easter. In a large-scale show of unity among unrecognized Protestant house churches, pastors from the Assemblies of God, Full Gospel Church, and the United Gospel Outreach Church preached at the service.

This event marked the first time unregistered house churches were allowed to hold a large-scale public celebration.

The Government continued to register and recognize religious organizations during the reporting period. As of the end of the reporting period, the Government recognized a total of 27 religious organizations affiliated with 11 recognized religions (Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Pure Land Buddhist Home Practice, Bani Muslim Sect, Threefold Enlightened Truth Path, Threefold Southern Tradition, and the Baha'i Community). The Government also has granted national registration to three religious organizations: two distinct religious groups, the Mysterious Fragrance from Precious Mountains and the Four Gratuities, and one Protestant denomination, the Vietnam Christian Fellowship. In addition, approximately 55 ECVN congregations were registered with local authorities in 2008 and the beginning of 2009. In total, 141 ECVN congregations have been registered.

The ECVN Church continued to grow in the Northwest Highlands and in Dien Bien Province in particular. Even though local and provincial officials registered only a handful of congregations in Dien Bien and Son La Provinces during the reporting period, most were able to conduct religious services and activities without incident.

Most SECV congregations and meeting places in the Central Highlands were able to register their activities with local officials and were allowed to operate without significant harassment. In October 2008 the SECV held a two-day celebratory service in Gia Lai Province commemorating the 65th anniversary of Protestantism in the province. More than 25,000 Protestants, local officials, and foreign dignitaries participated in the celebration.

SECV-affiliated churches and house churches generally reported improved conditions during the reporting period in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and Dak Nong. The SECV reported eight new Protestant SECV congregations and 22 additional SECV meeting points in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc Province were registered in the period covered by this report. In Gia Lai, the SECV reported all of its congregations had obtained registration, for a total of 44, and more than 230 meeting points had been registered, with only three meeting points remaining unregistered. One congregation may have multiple meeting points.

The SECV also opened a number of new churches in Gia Lai, Dak Lak, and Dak Nong provinces. Gia Lai authorities facilitated the construction of eight new SECV churches: Ia Grai District, Chu Se District, Mang Yang District, Chu Pah District, Duc Co District, Dak Doa District, and Pleiku City. The SECV obtained four more new construction licenses. The SECV continued to conduct Bible classes in these provinces to provide training to preachers in the region, allowing them to receive formal recognition as pastors. Ordination of new pastors is a key step in the formal recognition of additional SECV churches. In Dak Lak Province alone, the SECV has trained and ordained several hundred new lay pastors.

In Gia Lai Province, Catholics and United Baptist congregations noted an improved environment to conduct services, and both were allowed to hold special services to mark the Lunar New Year holiday.

The Full Gospel Church in Thanh Hoa Province reported that, while still unregistered, they have not faced difficulties since early 2009. They were conducting services on a weekly basis in eight different congregations throughout the province. Additionally, local provincial officials allowed more than 600 followers to gather for a Christmas celebration.

Police and other officials in the Northwest Highlands worked with house church leaders in some areas to inform them of the regulations on religion. The Government signed an agreement with the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, to conduct nine joint training courses for local officials and religious leaders in 2009. The CRA also conducted training sessions to educate provincial and district officials as well as religious leaders about the new religious regulations to ensure that they would "implement these policies in an orderly fashion." ECVN contacts in the Northwest Highlands confirmed authorities allowed nearly all unregistered congregations to worship in their homes and to meet openly, in accordance with the Prime Minister's 2005 Instruction. In May 2009 Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong met with leadership of the ECVN to congratulate the newly elected church leadership and to discuss issues facing the church. The Government announced it had invited the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion to visit later in 2009.

In response to continued concerns diplomats and foreign representatives expressed, the Government continued to revise a CRA-produced training manual for local officials in the Northwest Highlands that contained language disparaging Protestantism and instructing officials to encourage recent Protestant converts to return to their traditional animistic beliefs. The original manual was released in

2006. Revisions attempted to remove harsh language that the Government acknowledges was not in compliance with regulations. The new manual includes revised language explicitly stating that the forced renunciation of faith is "absolutely forbidden." The manual frankly recognizes the shortcomings in implementing the religious framework. Some Protestant Churches argued the manual continued to grant too much discretion to local officials in resolving disputes and encouraged disbanding nonregistered congregations.

The Government demonstrated a willingness to allow individual religious organizations to train the next generation of religious leaders, as demonstrated, for example, in allowing the construction of large-scale seminary programs for Catholics, Buddhists and many Protestant religions. The Vietnam Baptist Convention administered a full-time four-year theological seminary program. The first group of 19 students graduated in early 2009 with bachelor's degrees in theology. The second group of 30 students was admitted in 2007. The Baptist Convention also offers theological enrichment courses at regional hubs in Ho Chi Minh City, the Mekong Delta, Danang, Hanoi, and Haiphong. More than 100 pastors nationwide participated in this program. Once the pastors complete the 40 courses included in the part-time theological training they receive a bachelor's degree in theology.

Since its formal recognition in 2007, the United World Mission Church has trained more than 210 preachers, more than 160 of who were trained in 2008 alone. Because most lay pastors affiliated with the Church are ethnic minorities with jobs in agriculture, the Church created a part-time training program 10 days a month for five months. The Church offered room and board to the participating pastors and managed the program from its headquarters in Danang. The Committee for Religious Affairs facilitated the training by registering the program, assisting in creation of the curriculum, and providing speakers and funding. The Church also administered a full-time four-year theological seminary program serving 30 students scheduled to graduate with a bachelor of theology degree in 2010. Once the Church receives additional land, it plans to open an interdenominational theological academy.

During the reporting period, the SECV held three large-scale theological training courses for lay pastors in the Central Highlands that led to the ordination of several hundred new lay pastors. A fourth course with 120 participants was scheduled to begin in September 2009. Likewise, the ECVN also held numerous training activities for hundreds of ethnic minority lay pastors (H'mong and Dzao).

The Catholic Church reported continued easing of Government control over Church assignment of new clergy, and many new priests joined the seminary and were ordained. The Government no longer restricts the number of students who may enter seminary each year. The Catholic Church operated seven seminaries, with some 1,500 students enrolled, as well as a new special training program for "older" students. All students must be approved by local authorities to enroll in a seminary and must be registered prior to their ordination as priests, although the Church reported none of those who completed training were prohibited from ordination. Church authorities acknowledged that while the number of students being ordained remained insufficient to support the growing Catholic population, the Church lacked the internal capacity to open additional seminaries and enroll new students.

The Government granted permission for a new Catholic seminary to open in Nam Dinh Province, but due to a lack in capacity within the Church, the seminary did not open. In 2008 the Church opened a pastoral center in Ho Chi Minh City to train lay persons to serve as deacons and in other nonordained roles. Demand for theological studies exceeded expectations, and the center was at capacity. The Government also continued to facilitate the continued education of hundreds of priests overseas. The Catholic Church estimated that Vietnam was third in the world in sending Catholic priests overseas, after the Philippines and India.

The VBS operated four universities, eight colleges, 30 intermediate schools, and 25 primary schools that teach Buddhism to thousands of adherents and monks-in-training. The VBS reported approximately 50,000 monks nationwide.

In 2008 the first full classes began at the new university-equivalent academy focused entirely on Theravada Buddhism in Can Tho. The VBS opened the university in 2007. The Government provided land for the building and expansion of a larger academy. In addition, the Government expanded the Pali language secondary school in Soc Trang Province and continued to provide Pali language training materials to Khmer Krom monks and to encourage local Pali language training institutes at pagodas throughout the Mekong Delta. The Government covers tuition for the Khmer monks at all universities in the country, as it does for all education of Khmer ethnic minorities.

Many pastors of Protestant denominations such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, UGOC, and Assemblies of God preferred not to join the SECV or ECVN because of doctrinal differences. In many parts of the country, particularly in urban areas, these and other Protestant denominations reported they

were able to practice openly and with the knowledge of local officials. While there were exceptions, the level of official harassment of unrecognized house churches belonging to non-SECV and ECVN denominations continued to decline across the country. The Government held discussions about registration and recognition with leaders of a number of Protestant denominations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Attendance at religious services throughout the country continued to increase during the reporting period. The number of Buddhist monks, Protestant pastors, and Catholic priests also continued to increase, and restrictions on church services for Protestants generally continued to diminish. Catholics across the country were allowed to celebrate Christmas and Easter without interference. A handful of Protestant congregations in the Central Highlands had difficulty celebrating during the Christmas season but reported they were allowed to celebrate Easter without problems.

The ECVN continued to grow in the Northwest Highlands and in Dien Bien Province and Son La Province in particular. Although local and provincial officials registered only a handful of Protestant congregations during the reporting period, congregations in the two provinces reported an easing of restrictions and were able to conduct religious services and activities without incident. These congregations were able to celebrate Christmas and Easter without difficulty, a marked improvement from past years.

Despite protests surrounding land disputes, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Government continued to improve during the reporting period. Catholic leaders regularly travel to the Vatican for consultations. In June 2009 30 Catholic Bishops met with the Pope and presented a request for the Pope to visit Vietnam in 2010. The Government also continued to cooperate with the Catholic Church in nominations for bishops' appointments. For example, the Government expedited the ordination of three bishops in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Buon Ma Thuot. For the first time, Ha Giang provincial authorities also granted residency to a parish priest. In Moc Chau District in Son La Province, Catholics experienced fewer difficulties than in previous years and were allowed to conduct Easter and Christmas celebrations for 500 to 600 parishioners. They also reported a priest was allowed to conduct mass and give communion at an unregistered meeting point every other Saturday with more than 100 Catholics regularly in attendance. Similarly, authorities allowed a visiting priest to conduct Mass in Mai Son District on Palm Sunday.

On February 16-17, 2009, the Government and the Vatican held the first round of discussions in Hanoi under a newly created "Joint Vietnam-Holy See Working Group" on reestablishing diplomatic relations. The two sides issued a joint statement following their discussions noting the positive discussion and plans for future talks, and highlighting that "positive progress has been made in the religious life in Vietnam." After the formal discussions, the Vatican delegation, led by the Vatican Undersecretary for Relations with States, expressed his desire for the Pope to visit Vietnam by the end of 2010. The Government maintained its regular dialogue with the Vatican on a range of issues, such as diplomatic normalization, Church leadership, organizational activities, land issues, and interfaith dialogue. The Government also approved and worked with the Ford Foundation to sponsor a large exhibit on Catholicism at the National Ethnology Museum in Hanoi. The exhibit highlighted the religious life of practicing Catholics and asserted that "Catholic culture is an important part of the culture of Vietnam."

On May 9, 2009, in Hanoi, more than 2,000 nuns, monks, and representatives from the Hanoi Municipal Party Committee, the Hanoi Municipal People's Committee, and Buddhist monasteries participated in Vesak Day celebrations. Similar large-scale celebrations of high-ranking government officials and thousands of followers were held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vinh Long Province, Ninh Thuan Province, Hau Giang Province, and An Giang Province, also on May 9.

In May 2009 Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem met with the Secretary General of the World Buddhist Summit to plan for the World Buddhist Summit scheduled for 2010 in Vietnam. The Secretary General toured meeting sites in Hanoi, Ha Long Bay, and Quang Ninh and Ninh Binh Provinces.

UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang died at his monastery in Binh Dinh Province on July 5, 2008, after many years of restricted freedom of movement. Many senior UBCV monks, including Thich Quang Do, were allowed to travel to Binh Dinh to visit him in the final days of his illness and officiate at his funeral on July 11, 2008, amidst heavy police presence.

Pastors from the SECV, Methodist, UGOC and IEM churches in Binh Phuoc Province and Quang Nam and the Vietnam United Methodist Church in Hai Duong Province reported an improved environment for religious freedom and better relations with local officials.

In May 2009 the Government again facilitated the visit of a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) delegation. USCIRF Commissioners and staff met top government and religious leaders and were again accorded access

to political prisoners, dissidents, and their family members. The delegation travelled freely in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and the northwest provinces of Dien Bien and Son La.

The Government reported that in 2005-08, there were 3,277 newly built and upgraded or renovated places of worship. The Government also continued to issue land use certificates to religious establishments. Catholic and Protestant groups reported some progress on disputes over land claims. In the fall of 2008, provincial officials and the archbishop of Hue also reached agreement on an exchange of land to replace Catholic property that had been designated as a protected forest in An Bang Commune near Hue.

During the reporting period, a number of churches expanded their charitable efforts. After a 32-year hiatus, in October 2008 the Government reregistered Caritas Vietnam, a Catholic-affiliated nongovernmental organization whose operations focus on the needs of the disabled, orphans, ethnic minority and poor children; women, especially those living in poverty and victims of violence and of human trafficking; drug users; and persons living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. Catholic Relief Services also celebrated 15 years of operation in Vietnam in March 2009. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, the Catholic Church jointly with the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha supported HIV/AIDS hospices and treatment centers and counseling services to young persons. The Church also operated a shelter for HIV-positive mothers and HIV-infected children. During the second half of 2008, training courses to instruct Catholic priests, nuns, and lay people in the care of HIV/AIDS patients were launched in several Mekong Delta provinces. The Ho Chi Minh City government and the Catholic Church continued to discuss how to officially approve new social work initiatives, such as official legal status to carry out its HIV/AIDS activities and management of an orphanage, while allowing the Church to pursue these initiatives quietly.

Similarly, Thai Binh Province continued to encourage Catholic efforts on HIV/AIDS and the treatment of the sick and disabled. Haiphong authorities also continued working with the Catholic Church on drug addiction treatment and HIV/AIDS programs, and the Catholic Diocese of Nam Dinh operated an orphanage.

ECVN leaders reported that provincial authorities in Thanh Hoa and Nam Dinh actively encouraged their churches to expand charitable activities and specifically asked for donations to fund certain activities. The VBS engaged in humanitarian

activities, including anti-drug and child welfare programs, HIV/AIDS programs, and other charitable work across the country.

It is common practice for the VBS to manage low-income health clinics throughout the country. The city of Hanoi allowed a number of VBS-run temples to operate orphanages for abandoned and disabled children, along with HIV/AIDS treatment programs. Muslim leaders in Ho Chi Minh City reported support from city officials in their work to assist the poor. In Hue, Catholic nuns and VBS monks and nuns joined together to manage an HIV/AIDS treatment facility.

The officially recognized Cao Dai and Hoa Hao organizations also reported involvement in numerous charitable activities and local development projects.

The Government continued to publicize its new policy of religious freedom and tolerance through the bureaucratic organs of the state. The CRA continued to train more provincial propaganda cadres from the Northwest Highlands to disseminate policy information on religious freedom to reduce societal tensions between followers of traditional ethnic minority beliefs and Protestant converts.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were few reported instances of societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the reporting period.

The practice of Protestantism in the Central Highlands is complicated by the presence of "Dega" separatists, who advocate an autonomous or independent homeland for indigenous persons in the area, particularly in Gia Lai, Dak Nong, and Dak Lak Provinces. The relationship between the Dega movement and Protestant believers belonging to the SECV is tense in some parts of the Central Highlands. Dega activists reportedly have threatened that SECV pastors would not be allowed to serve in a "Dega State" unless they abandoned their ties to the SECV. Other Protestant pastors have accused the Dega movement of manipulating religion for political purposes.

Protestant Khmers also reported harassment, intimidation and, in some cases, property damage and beatings by Khmer Krom Buddhists in certain districts of Tra Vinh Province. They reported that authorities did little to prevent the incidents, and in some cases may have participated in or instigated the actions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City actively and regularly raised concerns about religious freedom with a wide range of Communist Party leaders and government officials, including authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, and other offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and the provinces. The Mission also maintained regular contact with religious leaders and dissidents.

The U.S. Ambassador, the Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, and other Embassy and Consulate General officers raised religious freedom issues with senior cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Public Security, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' External Relations Office in Ho Chi Minh City, other senior government officials, chairpersons of Provincial People's Committees around the country, and other officials, particularly in the Central and Northwest Highlands. Embassy and Consulate General officers maintained regular contact with the key Government offices responsible for respect for human rights. Embassy and Consulate General officers repeatedly informed officials that progress on religious freedom and human rights was critical to an improved bilateral relationship.

Mission officers urged recognition of a broad spectrum of religious groups, including the UBCV, Protestant house churches, and dissenting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. They urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups and for ending restrictions on unregistered groups. The Ambassador also requested the Government investigate alleged abuses of religious believers and punish any officials found to be responsible. Embassy officials also called for the registration and reopening of house churches that had been closed and resolution of longstanding property disputes.

Representatives of the Embassy and the Consulate General had frequent contact with leaders of major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Baha'is, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslims. The Embassy and Consulate General also had regular contact with senior VBS-affiliated monks, including Thich Thanh Tu, Vice Standing President of the VBS Executive Council; Thich Gia Quang, Deputy General Secretary of the VBS Executive Council; Thich Tri Quang, chief monk of the Ho Chi Minh City VBS; and Thich Duong Nhon, chief monk of VBS in Soc Trang Province. Embassy and Consulate General officers maintained regular contact with Thich Quang Do and other UBCV-

affiliated monks. Embassy and Consulate General officers met with the cardinal of Ho Chi Minh City, the Catholic archbishops of Hue and Hanoi, and the bishops of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kontum, Can Tho, Lang Son, Son Tay, Thanh Hoa, Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh, Buon Ma Thuot, and Haiphong dioceses, as well as other members of the Catholic Episcopal Conference. Embassy and Consulate General officers also met repeatedly with leaders of the SECV, ECVN, and various Protestant house churches, and with leaders of the Muslim community. When traveling outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Embassy and Consulate General officers regularly met with provincial religious affairs committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers. Mission officers continued to encourage and monitor implementation of the Government's legal framework on religion on a regular basis, at the national, provincial, and local levels.

The Embassy facilitated the visit of an officer from the U.S. State Department Office of International Religious Freedom. The visit included meetings with Government officials, religious leaders, and practitioners in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and provinces in the Northwest Highlands and Mekong River Delta. President Bush and Secretary Rice called for continued improvements in religious freedom in meetings with their counterparts during the reporting period. Religious freedom was also covered in the 2008 U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Constitution of Morocco provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government of Morocco as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Western Sahara has an area of 165,000 square miles and a population of 383,000. A majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, while a very small Catholic minority appears to function openly without significant problems. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, the veneration of religious figures and the tombs in which they are believed to be interred.

There is a small foreign community working for the U.N. peacekeeping contingent, the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Most of its members are not Muslims.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom in the territory are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

YEMEN

The Constitution does not protect or inhibit freedom of religion. Government policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is the source of all legislation. Muslims and followers of religious groups other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam and the proselytizing of Muslims.

There was a decrease in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, particularly with regard to the Baha'i and Jewish communities. Jewish residents of Amran Governorate experienced increased harassment and numerous threats from a small group of their Muslim neighbors; and following the killing of a Jewish community leader, many community members began making plans to leave the country. The Government appeared unwilling or unable to increase security for the remaining Jewish population, and generally perpetrators of violence against the community were not punished. For the first time, based on fears for the community's safety in the country, the U.S. Government initiated a special process to refer Yemeni Jews for refugee resettlement in the United States. During the reporting period, the Government detained members of the Baha'i community because of their religious beliefs and they faced deportation, and there were reports of arrests of Christian converts. Some Zaydi Muslims reported that they continued to feel targeted by government entities for their religious affiliation.

Relations among religious groups generally were amicable; however, reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice increased, particularly as related to the Jewish community in Amran Governorate. The ongoing, unresolved situation in Saada Governorate and increasing violence between government forces and al-Houthi rebels, who adhere to the Zaydi school of Shi'a Islam, caused political, tribal, and religious tensions to grow during the reporting period.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, the U.S. Government was particularly involved in protecting the rights of the Jewish community in Amran Governorate, as well as several Baha'is of Iraqi and Iranian descent at risk of being deported from the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 328,100 square miles and a population of 23 million.

Virtually all citizens are Muslims, predominantly belonging to either the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or the Shafa'i order of Sunni Islam. While there are no available statistics, Zaydis make up an estimated 45 percent and Shafa'is 55 percent of the population. There are a few thousand Ismaili Muslims who reside mainly in the north. There are reportedly 150 Baha'is.

Jews are the only indigenous non-Muslim religious minority. Nearly all of the once-sizable Jewish population has emigrated. Fewer than 250 Jews remain in Amran Governorate in the north of the country. The Government's inability to adequately protect this community from increased threats has led to the desire of much of the community to emigrate. Since January 2007 the historic Saada Governorate community of 60 Jews has lived in Sana'a, under the protection and care of the Government, after abandoning their homes in the face of threats from al-Houthi rebels. The community has abandoned its synagogues in Saada. Until the increase in violence against the Jewish community in December 2008 and January 2009 forced their closure, there were at least two functioning synagogues in Amran Governorate.

There are an estimated 3,000 Christians throughout the country, most of whom are refugees or temporary foreign residents. There are four churches in Aden, three Roman Catholic and one Anglican. There are approximately 40 Hindus living in Aden who trace their origins to India. Aden has one Hindu temple.

Among religious minorities, approximately 1,000 Christians and most Jews actively participated in some form of formal religious service or ritual, although not always in a public place of worship.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Neither the Constitution nor other laws protect or inhibit freedom of religion; however, government policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. In practice, this means that the local interpretation of

Shari'a is used as a basis for law. Followers of religious groups other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress. Shari'a forbids conversion and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing, however, and the Government enforces this prohibition. The Government requires permission for the construction of new places of worship and prohibits non-Muslims from holding elected office.

The Muslim holy days of Mouloud, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Muharram are public holidays.

The Government issues residence visas to priests so that they may provide for their community's religious needs. Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community were employed in teaching, social services, and health care.

The country maintains diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

The Government does not maintain records of an individual's religious identity, and there is no law that requires religious groups to register with the state; however, the General Election Committee has adopted a policy barring all non-Muslims from running for Parliament, and Jews are not eligible to serve in the military or federal government. Chapter 2, Article 106 of the Constitution notes that the President of the Republic must "practice his Islamic duties."

Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions; however, Muslim citizens can attend private schools that do not teach Islam. Almost all non-Muslim students are foreigners and attend private schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the fragile ceasefire between the Government and al-Houthi rebels in Saada Governorate began to break apart. The Government maintains that the al-Houthis are adherents of Twelver Shi'ism, a variant of Shi'ism that differs from that of the country's predominant Zaydi-Shi'a. The al-Houthis follow the late rebel cleric Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi, who was killed during a 10-week rebellion that he led in 2004 against the Government in Saada. Some Zaydis continued to report harassment and discrimination by the Government because they were suspected of sympathizing with the al-Houthis. Human rights groups reported that hundreds of Zaydis remained in jail because of their religious affiliation and without any connection to the fighting. However, it appeared the Government's actions against the group were politically, not religiously, motivated.

Government actions to counter an increase in political violence in Saada restricted some practice of religion. For the first time in 5 years, the Government allowed residents of Saada Governorate to celebrate Ghadeer Day (a Shi'a holiday). In Dhamar, however, Ghadeer Day celebrations in late December sparked violent clashes that left four dead and six injured. During the reporting period, the Government also reportedly continued its efforts to stop the growth of the al-Houthis' popularity by limiting the hours that mosques were permitted to be open to the public. The Government maintained that it was only enforcing existing tradition that mosques should be used primarily for prayer and not for political activities. The Government continued to close down what it claimed to be extremist Shi'a religious institutes, reassigning imams who were thought to espouse radical doctrine and continuing monitoring of mosque sermons.

The Government prohibits the proselytizing of Muslims. Under Shari'a, as applied in the country, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, which the Government interprets as a crime punishable by death.

The Government does not allow the building of new public places of worship without previous authorization. Roman Catholic officials at the end of this reporting period, as in previous periods, were still waiting for a decision from the Government on whether it would allow an officially recognized Roman Catholic establishment to be built in Sana'a. Church officials did not, however, attribute government inaction to discrimination.

Weekly services for Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians were held throughout Sana'a, Aden, and other cities without government interference. Throughout the country, Christians and Jews held services regularly in private homes or facilities such as schools without harassment, and such facilities appeared adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved.

The ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and the Islah opposition party both drew on Islam as a basis for law in their platforms. The ruling GPC did not exclude members of any religion from its membership. Islah required that a member must be "committed" to Islamic teachings. There were other minor political parties that were said to be Islamic in nature, although it was not clear if they restricted their membership to Muslims.

During the reporting period, the Government continued its efforts to prevent the politicization of mosques and schools, as well as to curb extremism and increase

tolerance. The Government's efforts concentrated on monitoring mosques for sermons that incite violence or other political statements that it considered harmful to public security. Private Islamic organizations could maintain ties to international Islamic organizations; however, the Government sporadically monitored their activities through the police and intelligence authorities.

The Government also continued efforts to close unlicensed schools and religious centers. By the end of the reporting period, a total of more than 4,500 unlicensed religious schools and institutions had been closed over several years. The Government expressed concern that these schools deviated from formal educational requirements and promoted militant ideology. The Government also deported some foreign students found studying in unlicensed religious schools. The Government prohibited private and national schools from teaching courses outside of the officially approved curriculum. The purpose of these actions was ostensibly to curb ideological and religious extremism and intolerance in schools.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no specific reports that the Ministry of Culture and the Political Security Organization (PSO) monitored and sometimes removed from stores books that espoused Zaydi-Shi'a doctrine. Human rights groups, however, believed that such practices continued. There were also credible reports from Zaydi scholars and politicians that authorities continued to ban the publishing of some materials that promoted Zaydi-Shi'a Islam. The Government denied that the media was subject to censorship by any security apparatus.

Government policy generally does not prohibit or provide punishment for the possession of non-Islamic religious literature. In previous reporting periods, there were credible reports that the PSO, which reports directly to the President's Office, and police harassed people for possessing such literature. In previous reporting periods, there were also reports that some members of the PSO monitored, harassed, and occasionally censored the mail of missionary groups and those associated with them, ostensibly to prevent proselytizing. While there were no specific reports of these actions during the reporting period, human rights groups believed that such actions persisted.

Following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, owners of property expropriated by the communist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were invited to seek restitution; however, implementation has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to previous owners. In exchange for its confiscated property, the Catholic Church requested

from the Government a small plot of land in Sana'a on which to build a Catholic establishment. The Church was still awaiting action on the request at the end of the reporting period.

Some local customs, believed to be part of Shari'a as practiced in the country, are codified in various laws and policies. Some of these laws discriminate against women and persons of other religious groups.

According to the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, Muslim women are not permitted to marry outside of Islam. Under 1992 Personal Status Law No. 20, men are permitted to marry as many as four wives. The law forbids men from marrying non-Muslims (except for Jews and Christians) or apostates (those who have renounced Islam).

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, there were credible reports that several converts from Islam to Christianity continued to be detained by authorities.

On June 20, 2008, according to independent reports, seven Baha'is (two Yemenis, four Iranians, and one Iraqi) were arrested in their homes during raids by police and detained without charges filed against them. The two Yemenis were subsequently released. The Government released the five foreign detainees in October 2008 on the condition that they leave the country within 2 months or face deportation to their native countries. At the end of the reporting period, the issue had not been fully resolved.

In June 2008 a convert to Christianity and two of his associates were reportedly arrested in Hodeida for "promoting Christianity and distributing the Bible." They were reportedly transferred by the authorities to a jail in Sana'a. Four other associates, who evaded capture, were sought by the authorities. No further information was available at the end of the reporting period.

In May 2008 Imam Mohammed Ahmed Miftah disappeared after his car was attacked by gunmen from two other vehicles. Previously, Miftah was sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment, and later pardoned, for allegedly establishing contacts with Iran for the purpose of harming the country. Prominent Zaydis blamed the Government for this incident. Miftah was believed to be in PSO custody at the end of the reporting period. In May 2006 President Saleh had pardoned Imam Miftah, along with Imam Yahia Hussein al-Dailami, who had been sentenced to death.

The two men publicly opposed the Government's action in Saada and formed the Sana'a Youth Organization, a Zaydi religious-based group that supported the al-Houthis. Both men maintained that they advocated only peaceful dissent against government action in Saada.

In 2007 there was a credible newspaper report that claimed security officials harassed and detained a Muslim carrying Christian missionary publications in Taiz.

Forced Religious Conversion

There was one report of an attempted forced religious conversion. On December 22, 2008, a prominent Jewish community leader was killed in Reyda allegedly because of his refusal to convert to Islam.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

On June 14, 2009, nine foreigners working at a hospital in Saada were kidnapped by armed men. Three of the hostages were killed immediately. The other six hostages remained missing at the end of the reporting period. An investigation was ongoing, but religious extremists reportedly targeted the foreigners because of rumors that they were Christian missionaries proselytizing in Saada.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Relations among religious groups generally were amicable; however, reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice increased, particularly as related to the Jewish community in Amran Governorate.

Jewish residents of Reyda and Bait Harrash in Amran Governorate experienced increased harassment by a small group of their Muslim neighbors. Government officials appeared unable or unwilling to resolve these conflicts.

Following numerous incidents and threats, Jewish children reportedly stopped attending school. The community also closed its two synagogues, reportedly for fear of violence. As a result of the unprecedented level of violence, some Jewish residents of Amran Governorate left the country in 2009, and some others wished

to leave as well. For the first time, based on fears for the community's safety in the country, the U.S. Government initiated a special process to refer the Yemeni Jews for refugee resettlement in the United States.

On April 15, 2009, a group of private citizens burned down a man's home and two cars after he allegedly desecrated a Qur'an; the citizens were reportedly incited by several imams at local mosques. Parliament announced the formation of a committee to investigate the Government's handling of cases involving religious desecration; its results were pending at the end of the reporting period.

On January 4, 2009, a Jewish resident was hospitalized for injuries sustained in an altercation reportedly instigated by Muslim neighbors.

On December 27, 2008, an explosive device was thrown at a Jewish home in Rayda but did not cause any injuries or property damage.

On December 22, 2008, a prominent Jewish community leader was killed in Reyda because of his alleged refusal to convert to Islam. A man was tried for murder and convicted but received a light sentence without incarceration.

The remainder of the displaced Saada Jewish community continued to reside in Sana'a, under government protection and care, after being threatened by al-Houthi rebels in 2007.

There were no reported incidents of violence or discrimination between the adherents of Zaydi and Shafa'i Islam, the two main orders of Islam present in the country.

Religiously motivated violence was neither incited nor tolerated by the Muslim clergy, except for a small, politically motivated clerical minority, often with ties to foreign extremist elements.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains an active dialogue on human rights concerns with the Government, nongovernmental organizations, religious groups, journalists, human rights activists, and women's rights activists. Embassy officers periodically meet with representatives of the Christian, Jewish, and Baha'i communities.

ZAMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 290,586 square miles and a population of 12.5 million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, 1 percent Muslim or Hindu, and 7 percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Five percent did not report a religious affiliation.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in areas along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone and in Chipata and other parts of Eastern Province. Many citizens of South Asian descent are Muslim, although Hindus constitute a sizable percentage of this group as well. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

A 1996 amendment to the Constitution declared Christianity to be the official religion of the country while upholding the right of all persons to enjoy freedom of conscience or religion. Article 19 of the Constitution provides for freedom of

thought and religion for all citizens, freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Other statutes provide effective remedies for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies in the Ministry of Home Affairs. To be eligible for registration, groups must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and display general compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups may be fined and members imprisoned for up to seven years. During the reporting period, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups.

The Government requires Christian religious instruction in public schools. The classes are conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and are mandatory for all students through grade seven. Islamic or other forms of religious education are not available in public schools; however, they are available in some private schools.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

On April 13, 2009, the Catholic Church relieved a priest of his duties and his parish, reportedly in response to government pressure after the priest criticized the Government harshly on his popular radio program. However, religious leaders were generally free to criticize the Government, organize political activities, and mobilize public opinion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Leaders of ecumenical movements, such as the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and to discuss national concerns.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Embassy officials met with a wide spectrum of religious representatives to promote interreligious dialogue and collaboration.

ZIMBABWE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws contributed to generally free practice of religion.

The Government arrested, harassed, and prevented church attendance by Anglican clergy and parishioners from the Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA). The Government also harassed religious leaders who were critical of government policies, who spoke out against human rights abuses committed by the Government, and who provided humanitarian assistance to citizens during a nearly three-month ban on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

There were continuing reports of tensions between indigenous religious groups and mainstream Christian churches.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government, religious groups, and NGOs as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 150,760 square miles and an estimated population of nine million. Between 70 and 80 percent of the population is Christian, primarily Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist; there are also a significant number of independent churches. While the country is overwhelmingly Christian, the majority of the population also believes, to varying degrees, in indigenous religions. Religious leaders reported a continued increase in adherence to indigenous religious practices.

Muslims account for 1 percent of the population, primarily in rural areas where Muslim-led humanitarian efforts are often organized. The remainder of the population includes practitioners of Greek Orthodoxy, Judaism, and exclusively indigenous religions. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is.

While political elites tend to be associated with one of the established Christian churches, there is no correlation between membership in any religious group and political or ethnic affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion as well as to privately or publicly manifest and propagate their religion through worship, teaching, practice, and observance.

The Government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays.

A July 2006 amendment to the Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA) criminalizes any practice "commonly associated with witchcraft," but only if that practice is intended to cause harm. Spoken words alone are not considered a witchcraft practice or evidence of illegal activity. The amendment also criminalizes witch hunts, imposes criminal penalties for falsely accusing others of witchcraft, and rejects killing of a witch as a defense for murder. Attacks on individuals in witchcraft-related cases appear to be prosecuted under laws for assault, murder, or other crimes. In practice, the Government did not detain or prosecute persons for allegedly practicing witchcraft.

The Public Order and Security Act of 2002 (POSA) restricts freedoms of assembly, expression, and association. Although not specifically aimed at religious activities, the Government invokes the act to interfere with religious and civil society groups organizing public prayer rallies. While POSA exempts religious activities and events, influential persons in the Government view any public gathering that is critical of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party as political even if the nature of the event is religious.

The Government does not require religious groups to register; however, religious organizations that operate schools or medical facilities are required to register those specific institutions with the appropriate ministry regulating their activities. Religious institutions are allowed to apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department. These requests are generally granted.

The Ministry of Education sets curriculums for public primary and secondary schools. Many public secondary schools include a religious education course that focuses on Christian religious groups and covers other religious groups,

emphasizing the need for religious tolerance. Most public universities offer degrees in religious education that primarily focus on Christian doctrine.

The country has a long history of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist primary and secondary schools. The Government does not regulate religious education in private schools but does play a role in approving employment of headmasters and teachers. Since independence, there has been a proliferation of evangelical basic education schools. Christian schools, the majority of which are Catholic, constitute one-third of all schools. Islamic, Hindu, and Jewish primary and secondary schools are also in major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government viewed with suspicion missionaries it considered politically motivated. Some missionary organizations occasionally experienced significant delays implementing humanitarian relief activities and in having their work permits issued. During the ban on NGOs between June and August 2008, police officers and ZANU-PF party and government officials harassed church members when they attempted to distribute food, clothing, and other humanitarian assistance.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government arrested, harassed, and prevented church attendance by Anglican clergy and parishioners from the CPCA, the regional body of the Anglican Communion. Police continued to disrupt Anglican church services and strike worshippers, primarily women, with batons. They arrested parishioners, interrogated priests and lay leaders, and locked the doors of churches to keep worshippers away.

The Government continued to favor Nolbert Kunonga, the ZANU-PF-affiliated, former Anglican bishop of Harare, who formed the Church of the Province of Zimbabwe (CPZ) in 2007.

On May 21, 2009, after a disruption at an Anglican church in Kuwadzana, police accused the priest of stoning a police officer. During a weekly women's prayer meeting at the church, a Kunonga-affiliated priest had entered the church with a dog and told the women to leave. The Anglican priest then confronted the Kunonga priest and asked him to leave. The man returned with plain-clothed "neighborhood police" who beat up the priest at the church. The women attempted

to stop the violence and then were themselves restrained by reinforcements of riot police. The Anglican priest was arrested and held in custody for several days until he was released on bail. The priest's trial for assaulting a police officer began on June 15 and was in progress at the end of the reporting period.

On March 29, 2009, approximately 25 riot police prevented parishioners from entering the St. Francis' Anglican Church in the Glen Norah suburb of Harare. When the crowd did not disperse, police beat some church members with batons; police also beat a local councilor who attempted to peacefully resolve the situation. When the priest refused to dismiss the 400-500 parishioners from the church lawn, he and three others were arrested for disturbing the peace. As police attempted to disperse the crowd, they threw tear gas and fired live ammunition into the air, ostensibly as a warning. However, one bullet struck a man in a house adjacent to the church, piercing his hand. The following day, the priest was further charged with inciting violence as a result of the gunshot wound. The court case began on June 16 and was underway at the end of the reporting period.

On March 22, 2009, police arrested five members of the CPCA on criminal charges of malicious injury to property. The charges stemmed from a disturbance at an Anglican church in the Harare suburb of Tafara. When Kunonga supporters barred CPCA women from entering the church to conduct prayers, the CPCA women forced their way through the gate, causing it to fall off the hinges. During the scuffle, several church windows were broken as well. The Kunonga supporters called the police who arrested five CPCA parishioners whom they accused of breaking the windows and gate. The trial began on June 22 and was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On March 16, 2009, the priest at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in the Glenview neighborhood of Harare led parishioners to the church to hold a service. When police refused to let the parishioners enter the church, the priest led a service under a tree outside the church. Police attempted to disperse the group by throwing an estimated 20 tear gas canisters. The tear gas entered homes near the church, affecting residents. The priest and his followers refused to leave and spent nine hours sitting in the yard praying.

On February 13, 2009, the CPCA filed a contempt of court case against the commissioner of police, Augustine Chihuri, and the Minister of Home Affairs for their role in ordering police to intervene on behalf of Kunonga. On April 7, 2009, the co-Ministers of Home Affairs directed Kunonga and Reverend Sebastian Bakare -- the new Anglican bishop of Harare appointed by the CPCA -- to observe

an interim court order that allowed both groups to share church buildings and worship spaces. The co-ministers also directed police to stop interfering with church services. A court hearing took place on June 29, 2009, to resolve the dispute over church assets. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In February 2009 three women parishioners from the Anglican church in Dzivarasekwa were summoned to court on charges of stealing an electrical cable belonging to a priest affiliated with Kunonga. On February 24, 2009, after a Kunonga-affiliated priest had locked church doors in Dzivarasekwa on January 13, February 10, and February 24 to prevent CPCA members from attending church, CPCA members advised the local police that Kunonga's priest was violating the church sharing arrangement. When the police refused to intervene, CPCA-affiliated women forced their way into the church. The Kunonga-affiliated priest subsequently filed a report alleging the CPCA members stole electrical cable. The women stood trial on June 23 and their case was in progress at the end of the reporting period.

CPZ priests and bishops forcibly asserted control of Anglican schools within the Harare province of the CPCA, sometimes with police assistance. On January 27, 2009, CPZ priests and police forcibly removed the headmaster, deputy headmaster, and bursar from a high school in Mashonaland East. As of June 2009 the CPZ members maintained control of the school. Community members protested the takeover and reported that the new headmaster and bursar are taking the students' school fees and using them to purchase personal vehicles. Kunonga loyalists have also blocked Anglicans from performing burials at the Anglican cemetery in Chitungwiza.

On August 17, 2008, police ordered the priest to terminate an Anglican church service in Kuwadzana. When he refused, police arrested the church rector and members of the church executive council. They were held for two days and released without charge.

After Nolbert Kunonga created the CPZ, the CPCA excommunicated him from the Anglican Communion. Police began disrupting Anglican services and detaining parishioners in January 2008 after the CPCA appointed Reverend Bakare. Police and Kunonga supporters prevented Bakare from conducting services in several churches and harassed Bakare supporters.

In August 2007 police detained 15 Christian church leaders for several hours for attending an allegedly unsanctioned meeting. Several members of the group were arrested again two days later and held for four days before being released without charge.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were continuing reports of tensions between indigenous religious groups and mainstream Christian churches, particularly on issues of polygamy, modern medicine, and political exclusion. However, religious leaders from a wide spectrum of groups continued to discuss these matters productively in interfaith council meetings.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government, religious groups, and NGOs as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials expressed concern about the intimidation and harassment of religious officials who criticized the Government.

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore, The General Assembly, proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote

respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of a kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional, or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing, or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense.
2. No one shall be held guilty without any limitation due to race, of any penal offence on account of nationality or religion, have the any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor be denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration insuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary, or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group, or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Hundred and eighty-third plenary meeting

Resolution 217(A)(III) of the United Nations General Assembly,

December 10, 1948

(This material is in the public domain and may be reprinted without permission; citation of this source is appreciated.)

APPENDIX B

INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Covenant,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world,

Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person,

Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social, and cultural rights,

Considering the obligation of States under the Charter of the United Nations to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights, and freedoms,

Realizing that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant,

Agree upon the following articles:

PART I

Article 1

1. All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.
2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

PART II

Article 2

1. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

2. Where not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures, each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take the necessary steps, in accordance with its constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant, to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant.

3. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes:

- (a) To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity;
- (b) To ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy;
- (c) To ensure that the competent authorities shall enforce such remedies when granted.

Article 3

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant.

Article 4

1. In time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided

that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion, or social origin.

2. No derogation from articles 6, 7, 8 (paragraphs I and 2), 11, 15, 16, and 18 may be made under this provision.
3. Any State Party to the present Covenant availing itself of the right of derogation shall immediately inform the other States Parties to the present Covenant, through the intermediary of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, of the provisions from which it has derogated and of the reasons by which it was actuated. A further communication shall be made, through the same intermediary, on the date on which it terminates such derogation.

Article 5

1. Nothing in the present Covenant may be interpreted as implying for any State, group, or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms recognized herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the present Covenant.
2. There shall be no restriction upon or derogation from any of the fundamental human rights recognized or existing in any State Party to the present Covenant pursuant to law, conventions, regulations, or custom on the pretext that the present Covenant does not recognize such rights or that it recognizes them to a lesser extent.

Part III

Article 6

1. Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.
2. In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime and not contrary to the provisions of the present Covenant and to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This penalty can only be carried out pursuant to a final judgement rendered by a competent court.
3. When deprivation of life constitutes the crime of genocide, it is understood that nothing in this article shall authorize any State Party to the present Covenant to derogate in any way from any obligation assumed under the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

4. Anyone sentenced to death shall have the right to seek pardon or commutation of the sentence. Amnesty, pardon, or commutation of the sentence of death may be granted in all cases.
5. Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant women.
6. Nothing in this article shall be invoked to delay or to prevent the abolition of capital punishment by any State Party to the present Covenant.

Article 7

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

Article 8

1. No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited.
2. No one shall be held in servitude.
3. (a) No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour;
(b) Paragraph 3 (a) shall not be held to preclude, in countries where imprisonment with hard labour may be imposed as a punishment for a crime, the performance of hard labour in pursuance of a sentence to such punishment by a competent court;
(c) For the purpose of this paragraph the term "forced or compulsory labour" shall not include:
 - (i) Any work or service, not referred to in subparagraph (b), normally required of a person who is under detention in consequence of a lawful order of a court, or of a person during conditional release from such detention;
 - (ii) Any service of a military character and, in countries where conscientious objection is recognized, any national service required by law of conscientious objectors;
 - (iii) Any service exacted in cases of emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;
 - (iv) Any work or service which forms part of normal civil obligations.

Article 9

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty

except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.

2. Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.
3. Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release. It shall not be the general rule that persons awaiting trial shall be detained in custody, but release may be subject to guarantees to appear for trial, at any other stage of the judicial proceedings, and, should occasion arise, for execution of the judgement.
4. Anyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings before a court, in order that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention and order his release if the detention is not lawful.
5. Anyone who has been the victim of unlawful arrest or detention shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

Article 10

1. All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.
2. (a) Accused persons shall, save in exceptional circumstances, be segregated from convicted persons and shall be subject to separate treatment appropriate to their status as unconvicted persons;
(b) Accused juvenile persons shall be separated from adults and brought as speedily as possible for adjudication.
3. The penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation. Juvenile offenders shall be segregated from adults and be accorded treatment appropriate to their age and legal status.

Article 11

No one shall be imprisoned merely on the ground of inability to fulfil a contractual obligation.

Article 12

1. Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence.
2. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.

3. The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.

4. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.

Article 13

An alien lawfully in the territory of a State Party to the present Covenant may be expelled therefrom only in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with law and shall, except where compelling reasons of national security otherwise require, be allowed to submit the reasons against his expulsion and to have his case reviewed by, and be represented for the purpose before, the competent authority or a person or persons especially designated by the competent authority.

Article 14

1. All persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, or of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. The press and the public may be excluded from all or part of a trial for reasons of morals, public order (ordre public), or national security in a democratic society, or when the interest of the private lives of the parties so requires, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice; but any judgement rendered in a criminal case or in a suit at law shall be made public except where the interest of juvenile persons otherwise requires or the proceedings concern matrimonial disputes or the guardianship of children.

2. Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall have the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

3. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, everyone shall be entitled to the following minimum guarantees, in full equality:

(a) To be informed promptly and in detail in a language which he understands of the nature and cause of the charge against him;

(b) To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence and to communicate with counsel of his own choosing;

(c) To be tried without undue delay;

(d) To be tried in his presence and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing; to be informed, if he does not have legal

assistance, of this right; and to have legal assistance assigned to him, in any case where the interests of justice so require, and without payment by him in any such case if he does not have sufficient means to pay for it;

(e) To examine, or have examined, the witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;

(f) To have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court;

(g) Not to be compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt.

4. In the case of juvenile persons, the procedure shall be such as will take account of their age and the desirability of promoting their rehabilitation.

5. Everyone convicted of a crime shall have the right to his conviction and sentence being reviewed by a higher tribunal according to law.

6. When a person has by a final decision been convicted of a criminal offence and when subsequently his conviction has been reversed or he has been pardoned on the ground that a new or newly discovered fact shows conclusively that there has been a miscarriage of justice, the person who has suffered punishment as a result of such conviction shall be compensated according to law, unless it is proved that the non-disclosure of the unknown fact in time is wholly or partly attributable to him.

7. No one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which he has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country.

Article 15

1. No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time when the criminal offence was committed. If, subsequent to the commission of the offence, provision is made by law for the imposition of the lighter penalty, the offender shall benefit thereby.

2. Nothing in this article shall prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognized by the community of nations.

Article 16

Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 17

1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 18

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Article 19

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
 - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 20

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Article 21

The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 22

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on members of the armed forces and of the police in their exercise of this right.
3. Nothing in this article shall authorize States Parties to the International Labour Organization Convention of 1948 concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize to take legislative measures which would prejudice, or to apply the law in such a manner as to prejudice, the guarantees provided for in that Convention.

Article 23

1. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.
2. The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognized.
3. No marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
4. States Parties to the present Covenant shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights and responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. In the case of dissolution, provision shall be made for the necessary protection of any children.

Article 24

1. Every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property, or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State.

2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.
3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.

Article 25

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
- (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

Article 26

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

PART IV

Article 28

1. There shall be established a Human Rights Committee (hereafter referred to in the present Covenant as the Committee). It shall consist of eighteen members and shall carry out the functions hereinafter provided.
2. The Committee shall be composed of nationals of the States Parties to the present Covenant who shall be persons of high moral character and recognized competence in the field of human rights, consideration being given to the usefulness of the participation of some persons having legal experience.
3. The members of the Committee shall be elected and shall serve in their personal capacity.

Article 29

1. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons possessing the qualifications prescribed in article 28 and nominated for the purpose by the States Parties to the present Covenant.
2. Each State Party to the present Covenant may nominate not more than two persons. These persons shall be nationals of the nominating State.
3. A person shall be eligible for renomination.

Article 30

1. The initial election shall be held no later than six months after the date of the entry into force of the present Covenant.
2. At least four months before the date of each election to the Committee, other than an election to fill a vacancy declared in accordance with article 34, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a written invitation to the States Parties to the present Covenant to submit their nominations for membership of the Committee within three months.
3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of all the persons thus nominated, with an indication of the States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Covenant no later than one month before the date of each election.
4. Elections of the members of the Committee shall be held at a meeting of the States Parties to the present Covenant convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations at the Headquarters of the United Nations. At that meeting, for which two thirds of the States Parties to the present Covenant shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those nominees who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.

Article 31

1. The Committee may not include more than one national of the same State.
2. In the election of the Committee, consideration shall be given to equitable geographical distribution of membership and to the representation of the different forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems.

Article 32

1. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. They shall be eligible for re-election if renominated. However, the terms of nine of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election, the names of these nine members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the meeting referred to in article 30, paragraph 4.
2. Elections at the expiry of office shall be held in accordance with the preceding articles of this part of the present Covenant.

Article 33

1. If, in the unanimous opinion of the other members, a member of the Committee has ceased to carry out his functions for any cause other than absence of a temporary character, the Chairman of the Committee shall notify the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then declare the seat of that member to be vacant.
2. In the event of the death or the resignation of a member of the Committee, the Chairman shall immediately notify the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall declare the seat vacant from the date of death or the date on which the resignation takes effect.

Article 34

1. When a vacancy is declared in accordance with article 33 and if the term of office of the member to be replaced does not expire within six months of the declaration of the vacancy, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall notify each of the States Parties to the present Covenant, which may within two months submit nominations in accordance with article 29 for the purpose of filling the vacancy.
2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of the persons thus nominated and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Covenant. The election to fill the vacancy shall then take place in accordance with the relevant provisions of this part of the present Covenant.
3. A member of the Committee elected to fill a vacancy declared in accordance with article 33 shall hold office for the remainder of the term of the member who vacated the seat on the Committee under the provisions of that article.

Article 35

The members of the Committee shall, with the approval of the General Assembly of the United Nations, receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such

terms and conditions as the General Assembly may decide, having regard to the importance of the Committee's responsibilities.

Article 36

The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Covenant.

Article 37

1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall convene the initial meeting of the Committee at the Headquarters of the United Nations.
2. After its initial meeting, the Committee shall meet at such times as shall be provided in its rules of procedure.
3. The Committee shall normally meet at the Headquarters of the United Nations or at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Article 38

Every member of the Committee shall, before taking up his duties, make a solemn declaration in open committee that he will perform his functions impartially and conscientiously.

Article 39

1. The Committee shall elect its officers for a term of two years. They may be re-elected.
2. The Committee shall establish its own rules of procedure, but these rules shall provide, inter alia, that:
 - (a) Twelve members shall constitute a quorum;
 - (b) Decisions of the Committee shall be made by a majority vote of the members present.

Article 40

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to submit reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made in the enjoyment of those rights:
 - (a) Within one year of the entry into force of the present Covenant for the States Parties concerned;
 - (b) Thereafter whenever the Committee so requests.

2. All reports shall be submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall transmit them to the Committee for consideration. Reports shall indicate the factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the implementation of the present Covenant.
3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations may, after consultation with the Committee, transmit to the specialized agencies concerned copies of such parts of the reports as may fall within their field of competence.
4. The Committee shall study the reports submitted by the States Parties to the present Covenant. It shall transmit its reports, and such general comments as it may consider appropriate, to the States Parties. The Committee may also transmit to the Economic and Social Council these comments along with the copies of the reports it has received from States Parties to the present Covenant.
5. The States Parties to the present Covenant may submit to the Committee observations on any comments that may be made in accordance with paragraph 4 of this article.

Article 41

1. A State Party to the present Covenant may at any time declare under this article that it recognizes the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications to the effect that a State Party claims that another State Party is not fulfilling its obligations under the present Covenant. Communications under this article may be received and considered only if submitted by a State Party which has made a declaration recognizing in regard to itself the competence of the Committee. No communication shall be received by the Committee if it concerns a State Party which has not made such a declaration. Communications received under this article shall be dealt with in accordance with the following procedure:
 - (a) If a State Party to the present Covenant considers that another State Party is not giving effect to the provisions of the present Covenant, it may, by written communication, bring the matter to the attention of that State Party. Within three months after the receipt of the communication the receiving State shall afford the State which sent the communication an explanation, or any other statement in writing clarifying the matter which should include, to the extent possible and pertinent, reference to domestic procedures and remedies taken, pending, or available in the matter;
 - (b) If the matter is not adjusted to the satisfaction of both States Parties concerned within six months after the receipt by the receiving State of the initial communication, either State shall have the right to refer the matter to the Committee, by notice given to the Committee and to the other State;

(c) The Committee shall deal with a matter referred to it only after it has ascertained that all available domestic remedies have been invoked and exhausted in the matter, in conformity with the generally recognized principles of international law. This shall not be the rule where the application of the remedies is unreasonably prolonged;

(d) The Committee shall hold closed meetings when examining communications under this article;

(e) Subject to the provisions of subparagraph (c), the Committee shall make available its good offices to the States Parties concerned with a view to a friendly solution of the matter on the basis of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the present Covenant;

(f) In any matter referred to it, the Committee may call upon the States Parties concerned, referred to in subparagraph (b), to supply any relevant information;

(g) The States Parties concerned, referred to in subparagraph (b), shall have the right to be represented when the matter is being considered in the Committee and to make submissions orally and/or in writing;

(h) The Committee shall, within twelve months after the date of receipt of notice under subparagraph (b), submit a report:

(i) If a solution within the terms of subparagraph (e) is reached, the Committee shall confine its report to a brief statement of the facts and of the solution reached;

(ii) If a solution within the terms of subparagraph (e) is not reached, the Committee shall confine its report to a brief statement of the facts; the written submissions and record of the oral submissions made by the States Parties concerned shall be attached to the report. In every matter, the report shall be communicated to the States Parties concerned.

2. The provisions of this article shall come into force when ten States Parties to the present Covenant have made declarations under paragraph I of this article. Such declarations shall be deposited by the States Parties with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall transmit copies thereof to the other States Parties. A declaration may be withdrawn at any time by notification to the Secretary-General. Such a withdrawal shall not prejudice the consideration of any matter which is the subject of a communication already transmitted under this article; no further communication by any State Party shall be received after the notification of withdrawal of the declaration has been received by the Secretary-General, unless the State Party concerned has made a new declaration.

1. (a) If a matter referred to the Committee in accordance with article 41 is not resolved to the satisfaction of the States Parties concerned, the Committee may, with the prior consent of the States Parties concerned, appoint an ad hoc Conciliation Commission (hereinafter referred to as the Commission). The good offices of the Commission shall be made available to the States Parties concerned with a view to an amicable solution of the matter on the basis of respect for the present Covenant;
- (b) The Commission shall consist of five persons acceptable to the States Parties concerned. If the States Parties concerned fail to reach agreement within three months on all or part of the composition of the Commission, the members of the Commission concerning whom no agreement has been reached shall be elected by secret ballot by a two-thirds majority vote of the Committee from among its members.
2. The members of the Commission shall serve in their personal capacity. They shall not be nationals of the States Parties concerned, or of a State not Party to the present Covenant, or of a State Party which has not made a declaration under article 41.
3. The Commission shall elect its own Chairman and adopt its own rules of procedure.
4. The meetings of the Commission shall normally be held at the Headquarters of the United Nations or at the United Nations Office at Geneva. However, they may be held at such other convenient places as the Commission may determine in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the States Parties concerned.
5. The secretariat provided in accordance with article 36 shall also service the commissions appointed under this article.
6. The information received and collated by the Committee shall be made available to the Commission and the Commission may call upon the States Parties concerned to supply any other relevant information.
7. When the Commission has fully considered the matter, but in any event not later than twelve months after having been seized of the matter, it shall submit to the Chairman of the Committee a report for communication to the States Parties concerned:
 - (a) If the Commission is unable to complete its consideration of the matter within twelve months, it shall confine its report to a brief statement of the status of its consideration of the matter;

(b) If an amicable solution to the matter on the basis of respect for human rights as recognized in the present Covenant is reached, the Commission shall confine its report to a brief statement of the facts and of the solution reached;

(c) If a solution within the terms of subparagraph (b) is not reached, the Commission's report shall embody its findings on all questions of fact relevant to the issues between the States Parties concerned, and its views on the possibilities of an amicable solution of the matter. This report shall also contain the written submissions and a record of the oral submissions made by the States Parties concerned;

(d) If the Commission's report is submitted under subparagraph (c), the States Parties concerned shall, within three months of the receipt of the report, notify the Chairman of the Committee whether or not they accept the contents of the report of the Commission.

8. The provisions of this article are without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Committee under article 41.

9. The States Parties concerned shall share equally all the expenses of the members of the Commission in accordance with estimates to be provided by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

10. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall be empowered to pay the expenses of the members of the Commission, if necessary, before reimbursement by the States Parties concerned, in accordance with paragraph 9 of this article.

Article 43

The members of the Committee, and of the ad hoc conciliation commissions which may be appointed under article 42, shall be entitled to the facilities, privileges and immunities of experts on mission for the United Nations as laid down in the relevant sections of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

Article 44

The provisions for the implementation of the present Covenant shall apply without prejudice to the procedures prescribed in the field of human rights by or under the constituent instruments and the conventions of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies and shall not prevent the States Parties to the present Covenant from having recourse to other procedures for settling a dispute in accordance with general or special international agreements in force between them.

Article 45

The Committee shall submit to the General Assembly of the United Nations, through the Economic and Social Council, an annual report on its activities.

PART V

Article 46

Nothing in the present Covenant shall be interpreted as impairing the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and of the constitutions of the specialized agencies which define the respective responsibilities of the various organs of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies in regard to the matters dealt with in the present Covenant.

Article 47

Nothing in the present Covenant shall be interpreted as impairing the inherent right of all peoples to enjoy and utilize fully and freely their natural wealth and resources.

PART VI

Article 48

1. The present Covenant is open for signature by any State Member of the United Nations or member of any of its specialized agencies, by any State Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice, and by any other State which has been invited by the General Assembly of the United Nations to become a Party to the present Covenant.
2. The present Covenant is subject to ratification. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
3. The present Covenant shall be open to accession by any State referred to in paragraph 1 of this article.
4. Accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of accession with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
5. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall inform all States which have signed this Covenant or acceded to it of the deposit of each instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 49

1. The present Covenant shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the thirty-fifth instrument of ratification or instrument of accession.

2. For each State ratifying the present Covenant or acceding to it after the deposit of the thirty-fifth instrument of ratification or instrument of accession, the present Covenant shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit of its own instrument of ratification or instrument of accession.

Article 50

The provisions of the present Covenant shall extend to all parts of federal States without any limitations or exceptions.

Article 51

1. Any State Party to the present Covenant may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall thereupon communicate any proposed amendments to the States Parties to the present Covenant with a request that they notify him whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that at least one third of the States Parties favours such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of the States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations for approval.

2. Amendments shall come into force when they have been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of the States Parties to the present Covenant in accordance with their respective constitutional processes.

3. When amendments come into force, they shall be binding on those States Parties which have accepted them, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Covenant and any earlier amendment which they have accepted.

Article 52

Irrespective of the notifications made under article 48, paragraph 5, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall inform all States referred to in paragraph I of the same article of the following particulars:

- (a) Signatures, ratifications and accessions under article 48;
- (b) The date of the entry into force of the present Covenant under article 49 and the date of the entry into force of any amendments under article 51.

Article 53

1. The present Covenant, of which the Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the United Nations.
2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall transmit certified copies of the present Covenant to all States referred to in article 48.

APPENDIX C

DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

The General Assembly,

Considering that one of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion,

Considering that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights proclaim the principles of nondiscrimination and equality before the law and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief,

Considering that the disregard and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or whatever belief, have brought, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to mankind, especially where they serve as a means of foreign interference in the internal affairs of other States and amount to kindling hatred between peoples and nations,

Considering that religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements in his conception of life and that freedom of religion or belief should be fully respected and guaranteed,

Considering that it is essential to promote understanding, tolerance, and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion and belief and to ensure that the use of religion or belief for ends inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, other relevant instruments of the United Nations and the purposes and principles of the present Declaration is inadmissible,

Convinced that freedom of religion and belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples

and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism and racial discrimination,

Noting with satisfaction the adoption of several, and the coming into force of some, conventions, under the aegis of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies, for the elimination of various forms of discrimination,

Concerned by manifestations of intolerance and by the existence of discrimination in matters of religion or belief still in evidence in some areas of the world,

Resolved to adopt all necessary measures for the speedy elimination of such intolerance in all its forms and manifestations and to prevent and combat discrimination on the ground of religion or belief,

Proclaims this Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief:

Article 1

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 2

1. No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other belief.
2. For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression "intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as

its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

Article 3

Discrimination between human being on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants on Human Rights, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.

Article 4

1. All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.
2. All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

Article 5

1. The parents or, as the case may be, the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.
2. Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.
3. The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of

religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

4. In the case of a child who is not under the care either of his parents or of legal guardians, due account shall be taken of their expressed wishes or of any other proof of their wishes in the matter of religion or belief, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

5. Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account article 1, paragraph 3, of the present Declaration.

Article 6

In accordance with article I of the present Declaration, and subject to the provisions of article 1, paragraph 3, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the following freedoms:

- (a) To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;
- (b) To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions;
- (c) To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief;
- (d) To write, issue, and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;
- (e) To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;
- (f) To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;
- (g) To train, appoint, elect, or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;
- (h) To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief;
- (i) To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.

Article 7

The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.

Article 8

Nothing in the present Declaration shall be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

APPENDIX D

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS' RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COMMITMENTS

Council of Europe: Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

Article 9 – Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

European Union: Charter of Fundamental Rights

Article 10 – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.
2. The right to conscientious objection is recognized, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE): Helsinki Final Act

Basket I Section VII Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief

The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

Within this framework the participating States will recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, religion, or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience.

OSCE: Vienna Concluding Document

(16) In order to ensure the freedom of the individual to profess and practice religion or belief, the participating State will, inter alia,

(16.1) – take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural life, and to ensure the effective equality between believers and non-believers;

(16.2) – foster a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities as well as between believers and non-believers;

(16.3) – grant upon their request to communities of believers, practicing or prepared to practice their faith within the constitutional framework of their States, recognition of the status provided for them in their respective countries;

(16.4) – respect the right of these religious communities to

- establish and maintain freely accessible places of worship or assembly,
- organize themselves according to their own hierarchical and institutional structure,

- select, appoint and replace their personnel in accordance with their respective requirements and standards as well as with any freely accepted arrangement between them and their State,
- solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions.

(16.5) – engage in consultation with religious faiths, institutions, and organizations in order to achieve a better understanding of the requirements of religious freedom;

(16.6) – respect the right of everyone to give and receive religious education in the language of his choice, whether individually or in association with others;

(16.7) – in this context respect, inter alia, the liberty of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions;

(16.8) – allow the training of religious personnel in appropriate institutions;

(16.9) – respect the right of individual believers and communities of believers to acquire, possess, and use sacred books, religious publications in the language of their choice and other articles and materials related to the practice of religion or belief;

(16.10) – allow religious faiths, institutions and organizations to produce, import and disseminate religious publications and materials;

(16.11) – favorably consider the interest of religious communities to participate in public dialogue, including through the mass media.

(17) The participating States recognize that the exercise of the above mentioned rights relating to the freedom of religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are provided by law and consistent with their obligations under international law and with their international commitments. They will ensure in their laws and regulations and in their application the full and effective exercise of the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief.

(32) They will allow believers, religious faiths and their representatives, in groups or on an individual basis, to establish and maintain direct personal

contacts and communication with each other, in their own and other countries, inter alia, through travel, pilgrimages, and participation in assemblies and other religious events. In this context and commensurate with such contacts and events, those concerned will be allowed to acquire, receive and carry with them religious publications and objects related to the practice of their religion or belief.

OSCE: Copenhagen Concluding Document

(9.1) [The participating States reaffirm that] everyone will have the right to freedom of expression including the right to communication. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. The exercise of this right may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with international standards.

(9.4) [The participating States reaffirm that] everyone will have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief and freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The exercise of these rights may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with international standards.

African Union: African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

Article 8

Freedom of conscience, the profession and free practice of religion shall be guaranteed. No one may, subject to law and order, be submitted to measures restricting the exercise of these freedoms.

Organization of American States (OAS): American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man

Article III – Every person has the right freely to profess a religious faith and to manifest and practice it both in public and in private.

Article XXII – Every person has the right to associate with others to promote, exercise and protect his legitimate interests of a political, economic, religious, social, cultural, professional, labor union, or other nature.

OAS: American Convention on Human Rights

Article 12 – Freedom of Conscience and Religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and of religion. This right includes freedom to maintain or to change one's religion or beliefs, and freedom to profess or disseminate one's religion or beliefs, either individually or together with others, in public or in private.
2. No one shall be subject to restrictions that might impair his freedom to maintain or to change his religion or beliefs.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion and beliefs may be subject only to the limitations prescribed by law that are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights or freedoms of others.
4. Parents or guardians, as the case may be, have the right to provide for the religious and moral education of their children or wards that is in accord with their own convictions.

APPENDIX E

TRAINING AT THE FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE RELATED TO THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT

I. Summary

Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act), the Department of State is tasked with training Foreign Service Officers in both human rights broadly and religious freedom specifically. The Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) works closely with the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF), in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), to integrate religious freedom issues into the regular curriculum at FSI. During the period covered by this report, members of the FSI training staff took part in conferences dealing with religious freedom, persecution, conflict, and reconciliation hosted by academic institutions, think tanks, and nongovernmental organizations. State Department officers from DRL and IRF regularly participate in FSI courses to brief students in area and professional studies courses, and individual briefings with FSI students on their specific portfolios. DRL and IRF officers routinely cover topics such as the international basis and standards for the right to freedom of religion, the theological beliefs of different religious groups, state actions against religious groups and other manifestations of violations of religious freedom, involvement of religious groups in politics, diplomatic tools used by the United States to promote respect for religious freedom, venues for protection of those who have fled religious persecution, and the relationships between religious freedom, democracy, and national security. FSI periodically consults with the staff of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to ensure the currency of its offerings in this area.

II. Courses Offered

The School of Professional and Area Studies (SPAS) at FSI offers training relevant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) in a variety of courses. The following are brief descriptions of courses offered by the divisions of Political Training, Orientation, Consular Training, and Area Studies.

FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER ORIENTATION (A-100)

During the A-100 Course, a senior State Department official from DRL presents a session on human rights, including international religious freedom. Students are provided key background materials on human rights and religious freedom on FSI's LearnCenter. They are also directed to key websites containing related materials.

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC TRADECRAFT (PG-140)

This is a three-week course. The students have been assigned for the first time to work in an embassy's or consulate's political, economic, or combined political/economic section. Political/Economic Tradecraft is a required course, in that the personnel system schedules officers assigned to political and economic sections to take PG-140 prior to their first assignment; exceptions are rare. The State Department expects that a large proportion of these officers/students during their careers will be directly responsible for preparing their post's human rights and religious freedom reports. Each iteration of Political/Economic Tradecraft includes a session on Human Rights Reporting.

GLOBAL ISSUES (PP-510)

This three-day course is given twice a year and is geared toward mid-level foreign affairs and national security professionals working for the Department of State and other agencies. In the fall, this course is combined with a separate module on human rights.

DRL provides a presentation in which U.S. human rights policy, including religious freedom issues, is discussed. An attorney from the Office of the Legal Advisor also presents on human rights laws, some of which pertain to religious freedom. In September 2009 the course will include a panel presentation by nongovernmental organizations working on human rights issues, including protecting and advancing religious freedom.

BASIC CONSULAR COURSE (PC-530)

PC-530 is a prerequisite for serving as a Consular Officer in the Foreign Service. It is designed primarily for Foreign Service Officers preparing to go overseas to fill

consular positions, dependents of U.S. government employees who will work as Consular Associates overseas, and domestic employees of the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

The Immigrant Visa portion of PC-530 addresses refugee and asylum issues as they pertain to consular officers. Training exercises in the Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Visa and American Citizen Services portions of the PC-530 course involve fictitious clients who represent religious minorities to sensitize Consular Officers to concerns relating to those affiliations.

AREA STUDIES

The Foreign Service Institute and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation annually sponsor a major symposium focused on religious freedom and the role of U.S. diplomats overseas. Officers in FSI language training and area studies courses take part in this symposium. The symposium brings together leading experts on religious issues and foreign affairs practitioners who can speak to the job-related aspects of religious freedom issues to provide our officers with a clear understanding of the importance of these issues and the challenges and responsibilities they will face.

Islam: Formation, Institutions, Modernity and Reform (AR-194)

This is a week-long course for those who work or will work on issues related to Islam, Islamism, or relations with Muslim communities. Starting with the formation of Islam and the Muslim community, the course provides a background to the major historical developments of Islam, with a special focus on Islam in the modern era. The course addresses issues relating to the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

Islam in Iraq (AR-193)

This is a three-day course for those who are being posted to Iraq or who deal with Iraqi issues from other locales. The course seeks to explain in brief general aspects of Islam and Islamic history, as well as to focus on the contemporary religious landscape of Iraq in particular. The following questions are addressed: How is that landscape configured? Literally, what are the holy sites of Iraq and how do Iraqis relate to them? Which religious events are important in Iraq and how are

they marked? Metaphorically, how does religion interact with regionalism, sectarian loyalty, religious networks, political affiliations, and class?

Islam: the Rise of Religion in Eurasia (AR-285)

This is a one-day embedded module within the Russia and Eurasia Intensive Regional Area Studies Course (AR-281).

Throughout the year, the course chairs in the Area Studies Division, in cooperation with DRL, ensure that their courses address both regional and country-specific issues of religion, religious freedom, and human rights. Participants receive substantial information encompassing the full range of issues affecting particular regions, including religious freedom and human rights, religious history, and religious traditions. Students also receive reading lists (and Internet guidance) that direct them to even more detailed material.

AMBASSADORIAL TRAINING

The Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs regularly speaks to the Ambassadorial Seminar on the importance of religious freedom and other topics within his/her purview.

III. Background Material on Religious Freedom

The following background materials related to religious freedom are made available (as hard copy or through website addresses) to FSI students:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Background Materials provided to students at FSI

- Main Internet Web Page of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, www.state.gov/g/drl/irf
 - Mission Statement for the Office of International Religious Freedom
 - Annual Reports on International Religious Freedom from 1999 through the present
 - Fact Sheets on the designation of Countries of Particular Concern
 - Department statements on religious freedom, specific to various countries
 - Remarks of State Department principals on religious freedom
 - History of the Office of International Religious Freedom
 - Background on the State Department's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad
- Main Intranet Web Page of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, available only to State Department officials
 - Links to legal documents and databases bearing on religious freedom, including the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998
 - Other policy papers and resources for researching religious freedom issues
 - Instructions for preparation of the upcoming Annual Report on International Religious Freedom
- Main Web Page of the independent, Congressionally funded U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, www.uscirf.gov
 - List of current members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
 - Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Highlights from Key International Documents:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 18)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (articles 18, 26, & 27)

APPENDIX F

THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has assumed responsibilities formerly charged to the Immigration and Naturalization Service under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). DHS is committed to ensuring that all claims for refugee and asylum protection are treated with fairness, respect, and dignity, and that all mandates of the IRFA for these programs are properly implemented. This appendix summarizes DHS actions during Fiscal Year 2009, as required under Section 102 (b)(1)(E) of the IRFA.

I. Training of Asylum Officers and Refugee Adjudicators

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a DHS component, provides extensive training to Asylum Officers to prepare them to perform their duties of adjudicating asylum claims. The training covers all grounds on which an asylum claim may be based, including religion. Asylum Officers receive approximately six weeks of specialized training related to international human rights law, nonadversarial interview techniques, and other relevant national and international refugee laws and principles.¹ During this course and in local asylum office training, USCIS provides Asylum Officers with specialized training on religious persecution issues. With the passage of the IRFA in 1998, the six-week training program expanded to incorporate information about IRFA as a part of the regular curriculum. In FY2009, staff members from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom, and a nongovernmental organization (NGO) participated in the IRFA training during the two six-week courses that were conducted. In addition, a continual effort is made to include further discussion of religious persecution whenever possible in both the six-week course and in local asylum office training. The Asylum Division regularly updates its training materials and conducts training in local asylum offices to reflect any recently

¹ Asylum Officers are required to complete two six-week training courses, "BASIC" and the Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AOBTC). BASIC covers the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and basic immigration law. The AOBTC includes international human rights law, asylum and refugee law, interviewing techniques, decision-making and decision-writing skills, and effective legal and country conditions research skills. In addition compulsory in-service training for all asylum officers is held weekly.

issued papers on religious persecution from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, USCIRF, or other organizations, as well as any recent developments in case law or country conditions on this issue.

As mandated by the IRFA, USCIS provides specialized training to Refugee Officers. The Refugee Officer Training Course (ROTC) consists of in-depth training on the international framework and principles of refugee protection, refugee law, laws governing admissibility to the United States, nonadversarial interviewing techniques, assessing credibility, country conditions research, and other critical topics. This five-week training course covers all grounds, including religion, on which a claim for refugee status may be based. During the training, students receive specialized instruction on religious persecution issues, including presentations by USCIRF representatives on the IRFA. USCIS has updated the primary lesson plan to reflect recent guidelines issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on religious persecution claims, as well as recent developments in refugee law. Approximately 100 officers have completed the training to date.²

In addition to the ROTC, USCIS also provides preparatory training to officers who are embarking on short-term overseas refugee-related assignments. This training includes detailed information on religious issues that will be encountered on the overseas assignment, as well as on specific issues related to refugee adjudications.

In FY 2009, the Refugee Affairs Division presented two separate two-week trainings, one to overseas Immigration Officers and one to domestically-based USCIS staff. These also provided substantive and intensive training on refugee law and procedure, including religion as one of the grounds for determining eligibility for refugee status.

Prior to each overseas detail, Refugee Officers and detailees receive a predeparture training, which focuses specifically on the issues related to the region where they will travel. This training may include any particular concerns regarding religious persecution in the region.

The Country of Origin Information Research Section (COIRS) of the Asylum Division of the Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate serves both asylum officers and refugee officers and maintains the Resource Information Center (RIC), a hard copy and electronic

² Like Asylum Officers, Refugee Officers are also required to participate in the six-week BASIC training.

collection of materials regarding human rights conditions around the world. The COIRS has published an on-line guide to Internet research that is available to asylum officers and refugee officers through the Asylum Virtual Library. The guide includes links to government and nongovernmental websites that contain information on religious persecution, as well as other issues relevant to asylum adjudications. The COIRS separately catalogs RIC holdings regarding religious freedom and related issues.

II. Guidelines for Addressing Hostile Biases

In the affirmative asylum context, applicants for asylum who cannot proceed with the asylum interview in English must provide their own interpreter. Prior to conducting any interpretation for the interview, the interpreter must take an oath to interpret fully and accurately the proceedings of the asylum interview. The asylum officer may terminate the interview to be rescheduled at a later date if the interpreter is found to be misrepresenting the applicant's testimony, is incompetent, or otherwise displays improper conduct.

USCIS includes specific antibias provisions in the interpreter services contract used by Asylum Officers in the Asylum Pre-Screening Program. The contract and interpreter oath also include special provisions that ensure the security and confidentiality of the credible fear process. Interpreters receive training on confidentiality and antibias and are instructed to recuse themselves if unable to uphold these standards. Asylum Officers report to the Asylum Division any concerns about the accuracy or neutrality of the interpretation, which in turn are raised to the contracting officer of the interpreter services company.

For refugee interviews, interpreters are arranged at circuit ride locations by the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) under contract to the Department of State. Prior to the refugee interview, interpreters are placed under oath by USCIS officers and swear or affirm that interpretation will be complete and accurate. If there are indications that the interpreter and applicant do not understand each other, or that the interpreter is not properly fulfilling obligations of the interpreter role, the Refugee Officer will advise the Team Leader and may request a different interpreter for the interview. In the event an interpreter is found to be incompetent, the Refugee Officer would raise the issue through the Team Leader to the OPE, which would then engage another interpreter.

Appendix G

OVERVIEW OF U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

The world's refugee population is estimated to be some 15.2 million persons per United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data for the end of calendar year 2008. Nearly 26 million more are displaced within their own countries by war, famine, and civil unrest. The United States works with other governments and international and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to protect refugees, internally displaced persons, and conflict victims, and strives to ensure that basic human needs for food, health care, water and sanitation, education, and shelter are met. The United States has been instrumental in mobilizing a community of nations to work through these organizations to protect and assist refugees worldwide, supporting major humanitarian relief operations and seeking durable solutions for refugees. For the vast majority of refugees, voluntary return to their homelands is the preferred solution. Where voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity is not feasible, other durable solutions are sought, including local integration in countries of asylum or resettlement in third countries.

Third country resettlement, including in the United States, is appropriate for refugees in urgent need of protection and for refugees for whom other durable solutions are inappropriate or unavailable. The United States considers for admission as refugees persons of special humanitarian concern who can establish that they experienced past persecution or have a well-founded fear of future persecution in their country of origin on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The legal basis for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is the Refugee Act of 1980, which embodies the American tradition of granting refuge to diverse groups suffering from, or fearing, persecution. The Act adopted the definition of "refugee" contained in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The following describes the program's efforts, by region, in meeting the needs of refugees worldwide who have faced religious persecution.

The USRAP processes refugee cases referred by UNHCR, U.S. embassies, and certain NGOs and works closely with them to strengthen this referral process.

Africa

For the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, religious freedom is respected, even where other conflicts hold sway or where there has been communal violence along sectarian lines as in Nigeria. The primary exceptions have been Sudan and Eritrea.

During the 22-year civil war between "North" and "South" the Government of Sudan conducted or tolerated attacks on civilians, indiscriminate bombing raids, and slave raids in the south, all with a religious as well as an ethnic dimension. Although the conflict in Darfur involves human rights abuses based on ethnic differences, it lacks the religious dimensions of the North-South conflict. With the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the North-South conflict, an interim National Constitution entered into force that includes specific religious freedom guarantees. The country remains in a state of political transition; however, the Government of National Unity has continued to impose some restrictions on non-Muslims in the north, while permitting the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) to develop a secular administration respecting the rights of Christians, Muslims, and others in the south. During Fiscal Year 2008, 375 Sudanese refugees who had found refuge in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya (primarily) were resettled in the United States. Although gains of the CPA remain tentative, efforts are focused primarily on repatriation of refugees to Southern Sudan. However, UNHCR continues to refer a limited number of Sudanese refugees in need of protection for consideration by the USRAP.

The Government of Eritrea continues to engage in systematic and egregious violations of religious freedom, including harassment, arrest, and detention of members of independent evangelical groups such as Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Reported abuses included severe beatings and torture of detainees. The Government of Eritrea also imposed greater control over the four approved religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, and Islam. Often detainees were not formally charged, accorded due process, provided medical treatment, or allowed access to their families; some are reportedly held in harsh conditions that include extreme temperature fluctuations. While many were ostensibly jailed for evasion of military conscription, significant numbers were being held solely for their religious affiliations or belonging to unregistered religious groups. In FY 2008, the U.S. accepted 251 Eritrean refugees. This reduction from previous years may

reflect the completed processing of a number of Eritreans who UNHCR referred to the United States from Shimelba refugee camp in Ethiopia.

East Asia

While many governments in East Asia permit freedom of worship, religious believers face serious persecution in some countries.

Genuine religious freedom does not exist in the DPRK. Consistent with the intent of the North Korean Human Rights Act, the United States has recently resettled some North Korean refugees in the United States.

The Government of China either prohibits or severely restricts independent religious activities. The Government continues to suppress, intimidate, harass, detain, and imprison some followers of those religions or spiritual movements not registered with the Government, most notably the (underground) Catholic Church loyal to the Vatican, Protestant "house churches," some Muslim groups, Buddhists loyal to the Dalai Lama. Practitioners of banned spiritual movement Falun Gong have also been subjected to arrest, imprisonment, and alleged torture.

In Burma the Government maintains a pervasive internal security apparatus that generally infiltrates or monitors meetings and activities of all organizations, including religious groups. The Government actively promotes Buddhism over other religions as a means of boosting its own legitimacy and continues harsh discrimination against members of minority religions. In FY 2008, the U.S. resettled 18,139 refugees from Burma, processed primarily in Thailand and Malaysia.

In Vietnam there have been a number of significant improvements in law and practice over the past three years, and the majority of Vietnamese who wish to follow a religion do so without significant harassment or interference. However, uneven implementation of religion laws, burdensome official oversight of recognized groups, and harassment of some groups continue to be serious problems. Some religious practitioners, especially ethnic minority Protestants and members of the banned United Buddhist Church of Vietnam, continue to suffer harassment, arbitrary detention, and physical intimidation, although reports of such incidents have declined. The Government claimed that it did not hold any religious prisoners; instead, people are usually convicted of violating national security laws or general criminal laws. While determining the facts in these cases is extremely difficult due to the lack of transparency in the justice system, religious

leaders from the major religious groups report that they do not have any followers in prison for their faith.

In Laos Protestants in particular suffer occasional arrest and imprisonment; forced renunciation cases, although isolated, have recently been on the rise.

Europe and Central Asia

In recent years non-traditional religious groups, many of them with ties to coreligionists in other countries, have suffered from harassment and occasional violence in a number of post-Soviet states. Most of these states regulate religious groups and activities, specifying a set of "traditional" religions with certain privileges denied to other groups. These states often require religious organizations to register with authorities and use this process as a mechanism of control. By refusing to register certain new denominations, they make such groups vulnerable to charges of illegal association.

The USRAP provides resettlement opportunities to religious minority members in post-Soviet states (as identified in the Lautenberg Amendment) with close family ties to the United States. The Department of State continues to work with UNHCR, NGOs (both faith-based and nonsectarian), human rights groups, and U.S. diplomatic missions to identify refugees for whom resettlement is appropriate, including persons who qualify under the 1980 Refugee Act on religious grounds. The USRAP has provided protection to Muslims, Jews, evangelical Christians, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians as well as individuals of other religious minorities in Europe and Central Asia.

Eastern Europe

In Belarus, and to a lesser degree in Russia, some minority religious groups suffer harassment and difficulties finding places to meet. In Belarus groups with international ties are sometimes accused of being security threats. In Russia there were indications that the security services treated the leadership of some groups as security threats. In some countries one's faith may be associated with ethnicity, patriotism, nationalism, or even with terrorism; and authorities may be suspicious of religious groups perceived as having political agendas and organizations.

Central Asia

In the case of Uzbekistan, members of Islamic groups not registered by the state are sometimes considered as potential terrorists and suffer harassment or imprisonment. Members of some Christian or other minority religious groups with

ethnic Uzbek members, who are seen as politically and socially destabilizing, also suffer harassment and detention. In the case of Turkmenistan, although the level of harassment has decreased, the Government continues to restrict all forms of religious expression.

South Asia

Repression of religious minorities is common in some countries in South Asia. In Pakistan discriminatory legislation persists, and the Government fails to take action against religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus. In India some state governments limited religious freedom and police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly enough to effectively counter communal attacks, including attacks against religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. In Afghanistan, despite constitutional guarantees, religious freedom is limited because of legislative ambiguity, a developing judiciary, and deference to local interpretations of Shari'a. Years of weak democratic institutions have contributed to intolerance manifested in acts of harassment against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities. The Department of State continues efforts to improve access to refugee processing through dialogue with NGOs and human rights groups who may identify victims with valid claims based on grounds of religious persecution. UNHCR also has addressed religious persecution issues in several regional workshops to increase the sensitivity of protection and resettlement officers to victims of religious persecution.

Near East

Repression of religious minorities is common in the Near East. In Saudi Arabia public non-Muslim worship is prohibited, as is conversion of a Muslim to another religion. In Yemen, despite government offers of protection, threats against a Jewish community led many to seek refugee resettlement in other countries including the United States. In December 2008, the U.S. Government initiated a special process to refer Yemeni Jews for refugee resettlement in the United States based on fears for the community's safety. In Iran members of minority religious groups continue to face arrest, harassment, and discrimination. In 2004 Congress passed a law that adds "members of a religious minority in Iran" to the list of categories of aliens who, in refugee processing, may benefit from reduced evidentiary standards for demonstrating a well-founded fear of persecution. Iranians who belong to religious minorities (Baha'is, Sufis, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians) are able to apply directly for U.S. resettlement processing.

UNHCR and U.S. embassies in the region facilitate access to the admissions program for individuals of other nationalities, including those who may qualify on religious grounds. UNHCR also has addressed religious persecution issues in several regional workshops.

Western Hemisphere

Religious freedom is widely respected in the Western Hemisphere. An exception is Cuba. The Cuban Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, the Government continues to place restrictions on freedom of religion. The Ministry of Interior through its state security apparatus engages in active surveillance of religious institutions. The USRAP is one component of the U.S.-Cuba Migration Accords that require the issuance of at least 20,000 travel documents for Cubans for permanent residence in the United States annually and explicitly includes religious minorities and human rights activists. More than 4,700 Cubans arrived in the United States under the USRAP during the reporting period.