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2003**

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COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
U.S. SENATE

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 102 OF THE
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT OF 1998

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FOREWORD

The report on international religious freedom contained herein was prepared by the Department of State in accordance with Section 102 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

The report is printed to assist Members of Congress in the consideration of legislation, particularly foreign assistance legislation.

HENRY J. HYDE,

Chairman, Committee on International Relations.

RICHARD G. LUGAR,

Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations.

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC, December 18, 2003.

Hon. HENRY J. HYDE, *Chairman,*
Committee on International Relations,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of Secretary of State Colin Powell, we are very pleased to transmit to Congress the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom 2003*. This report is prepared in compliance with the International Religious Freedom Act.

We sincerely hope that this report is helpful. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

PAUL V. KELLY, *Assistant Secretary.*

PREFACE

2003 REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Why The Reports Are Prepared

This report is submitted to the Congress by the Department of State 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

In August 1993, the Secretary of State moved to strengthen the human rights efforts of our embassies. All sections in each embassy were asked to contribute information and to corroborate reports of human rights violations, and new efforts were made to link mission programming to the advancement of human rights and democracy. In 1994 the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs was reorganized and renamed as the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, reflecting both a broader sweep and a more focused approach to the interlocking issues of human rights, worker rights, and democracy. In 1998 the Secretary of State established the Office of International Religious Freedom. In May 2002, John V. Hanford, III was sworn in as the second Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

The 2003 Report covers the period from July 1, 2002, to June 30, 2003, and reflects a year of dedicated effort by hundreds of State Department, Foreign Service, and other U.S. Government employees. Our embassies, which prepared the initial drafts of the reports, gathered information throughout this period 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.

After the embassies completed their drafts, the texts were sent to Washington for careful review by the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs and the Office of International Religious Freedom, both in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. They worked closely with other State Department Offices and the Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, who has ultimate responsibility for the Report on behalf of the Secretary of State. As they worked to corroborate, analyze, and edit the reports, the Department officers drew on reports provided by U.S. and other human rights groups, foreign government officials, representatives from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations and institutions, and experts from academia and the media. Officers also consulted with experts on issues of religious discrimination and persecution, religious leaders from all faiths, and experts on legal matters. The guiding principle was to ensure that all relevant information was assessed as objectively, thoroughly, and fairly as possible.

The Report will be used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy, and making assistance, training, and other resource allocations. As mandated by the IRFA, it also will be used as a basis for decisions on determining countries that have engaged in or tolerated “particularly severe violations” of religious freedom. Countries involved in these and other violations according to the IRFA are not identified as such in this report, but have been and will be engaged independently by the U.S. Government. The Report also will serve as a basis for the U.S. Govern-

ment's cooperation with private groups to promote the observance of the internationally recognized right to religious freedom.

A Word On Usage

In many cases, the International Religious Freedom Report states that a country "generally respects" the right of religious freedom. The phrase "generally respects" is used because the protection and promotion of human rights is a dynamic endeavor; it cannot accurately be stated that any Government fully respects these rights, without qualification, in even the best of circumstances. Accordingly, "generally respects" is the standard phrase used to describe all countries that attempt to protect religious freedom in the fullest sense. "Generally respects" is thus the highest level of respect for religious freedom assigned by this report.

INTRODUCTION

Americans have long cherished their own religious freedom. More recently, they have also come to cherish their government's advocacy for those millions around the world who suffer persecution for their religious beliefs. President Bush has time and again affirmed the signature priority that advancing religious liberty holds for our nation. From his National Security Strategy's declaration that "We will . . . take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments," to his conviction that "successful societies guarantee religious liberty—the right to serve and honor God without fear of persecution," he has made clear that religious freedom holds an integral place in American foreign policy.

This is in part because religious freedom holds such an integral place in America's history and identity. The American experiment began with many who repaired to these shores in search of freedom to worship, and it continued as that freedom was codified in our founding charters. In the President's words, "It is not an accident that freedom of religion is one of the central freedoms in our Bill of Rights. It is the first freedom of the human soul—the right to speak the words that God places in our mouths. We must stand for that freedom in our country. We must speak for that freedom in the world."

Indeed, in many respects religious freedom stands as the "first freedom," encompassing other bedrock liberties such as speech, assembly and conscience. Together, these rights constitute the seedbed of democratic development. They encourage not only the institutions and procedures of democracy, such as representative government and free elections, but also the virtues of democracy, including a government and citizenry that value and nurture human dignity. When the United States promotes religious freedom, it is promoting the spread of democracy.

Our own historical record is admittedly far from perfect, yet that very history makes us all the more determined to protect what has been won. It makes us doubly determined to help those millions of people beyond our borders who suffer because of their faith. The ideals that inspired our founding continue to anchor our policies today. We as a nation have always affirmed the principle that our Creator has endowed all people with fundamental rights and freedoms. We hold these rights to be sacred and inviolable. To protect religious freedom is also to protect the other rights inherent in our humanity; to deny religious freedom is also to deny a core principle of our personhood.

Though it is a priority of the United States, religious freedom is by no means our exclusive preserve. The past century in particular has seen a growing recognition by the international community of the universal nature of religious freedom and other fundamental human rights. This awareness has come at no small cost, borne as it was out of the hard lessons wrought by destructive ideologies, colonialism, and world war. Distilled from such suffering came a new appreciation for a common human nature that transcends cultural, racial, religious and other distinctions. This was exemplified in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other seminal treaties. These and other agreements make clear the overwhelming consensus of the world's nations that religious freedom is endowed in all persons and should be enjoyed by all.

This common agreement among the nations forms an effective basis for common action. The United States remains committed to advancing religious freedom by working with like-minded nations around the world. Though differences may persist on other issues in the international arena, protecting the freedom to believe and worship provides a meaningful cause for which we can work together. We have many partners in this cause and will continue to work diligently to find many more.

Promoting religious freedom is of special importance in the ongoing war against terrorism. All too often, countries that violate religious liberty also contribute to terrorism, intentionally or unintentionally. In some cases, those governments that are

hostile to religious liberty have also been hospitable to terrorism. In other cases, nations have targeted religious believers, even under the guise of anti-terrorism campaigns, and driven some towards radicalism and violence. Conversely, where governments protect religious freedom, and citizens value it as a social good, religious persecution and religion-based violence find no warrant and little appeal. Such societies not only tolerate religious differences, but many of their members see the exercise of religious devotion as constitutive of human freedom and dignity.

Though international law may uphold it, and though millions of religious believers around the world may desire it, religious freedom all too often remains fragile, neglected, and violated. Many religious believers find themselves forced to worship furtively instead of confidently, or to hold their sacred beliefs in fear and secrecy rather than with peace and security. Many others suffer manifest hardships for their faith, including beatings, torture, detention, imprisonment, or death.

The United States Government remains steadfast in its resolve to stand with the persecuted and to speak out on behalf of those whose governments would silence them. In seeking to prevent or remedy abuses, the first and often most vital step is to ensure that the stories are told, the abuses revealed, the restrictions exposed. This report attempts to do just that. Yet the catalogue of religious freedom worldwide is hardly confined to the negative, and neither is this report. It also seeks to describe positive trends and to highlight improvements.

This, the fifth annual edition of the International Religious Freedom Report, is issued in accordance with the mandate of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. The report attempts to establish a baseline of fact about the status of religious freedom worldwide, both to illuminate the problems that exist and to provide a primary source for U.S. religious freedom policy. The first four editions have generally been resisted and criticized by violator governments, but hailed by many religious believers, human rights NGO's, and other governments as the standard worldwide reference on religious persecution.

THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom has now completed its fifth year. The Office has the simple yet daunting mission of promoting religious freedom worldwide. The Ambassador is charged with the responsibility of serving as the principal advisor to the President and the Secretary of State on matters of international religious freedom.

The Ambassador and his staff monitor the worldwide status of religious persecution and discrimination and devise strategies to reduce the abuses. Just as importantly, they develop strategies to promote religious freedom, both to attack the root causes of persecution and as a means of advancing other fundamental U.S. interests, such as protecting other core human rights, encouraging the growth of mature democracies, and furthering the war against terrorism.

These strategies are carried out in a variety of ways, using the range of diplomatic tools available, including both formal and informal bilateral negotiations with foreign government authorities; participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe; cooperation with human rights and faith-based NGOs; and meetings with victims of persecution. Often the Ambassador and staff, along with other U.S. officials, engage in direct intervention in particular crises in order to remove people of faith from harm's way or to forestall further persecution.

In all cases, the Office, which is staffed with experienced Foreign Service and Civil Service officers, works closely with its counterparts elsewhere in the State Department, the U.S. Government, and in U.S. missions overseas. U.S. Foreign Service officers abroad form the front line of our religious freedom policy. Many of their activities, and those of the Office of International Religious Freedom, are discussed in Part III of the Executive Summary. Some of their most heroic actions, however, must necessarily remain out of the spotlight in order to protect those involved.

As I continue my term as the second U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, I wish to thank all the employees of the Department of State here and abroad who have made this report possible. In particular, I want to acknowledge the dedicated work of our human rights officers throughout the world, as well as the members of the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs at the State Department, who have worked long and hard to craft this report. I also want to express appreciation for the vigilant and bipartisan support that Congress has demonstrated on this issue. Finally, I wish to thank my own staff in the Office of

International Religious Freedom, whose commitment to religious freedom for all people is both indefatigable and inspiring.

JOHN V. HANFORD III,
Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A core American value and a cornerstone of democracy, religious freedom is a central tenet of United States foreign policy. As President Bush has repeatedly affirmed, religious freedom is a key component of U.S. efforts to ensure security, protect stability, and promote liberty. Religious freedom reinforces the development and strength of civil societies, and it dampens the appeal of religious extremism and religion-based terrorism. Moreover, religious freedom is a universal value, not confined to any one region or faith, but recognized in international law and by many religious traditions worldwide.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, declared “the inherent dignity and . . . the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.” The Declaration stated that “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.” It proclaimed as one of humanity’s highest aspirations the advent of a world in which people enjoyed freedom of belief. Article 18 declared that “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.” (See Appendix A.)

The Universal Declaration was echoed in other seminal international agreements obligating nations to respect religious freedom, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. (See Appendix B.) Nearly all of the world’s governments have committed themselves through these agreements to protect the right of religious freedom for everyone who lives within their borders.

Despite these widely accepted international instruments, however, much of the world’s population lives in countries in which the right to religious freedom is restricted or prohibited. Millions of persons live under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes determined to control religious belief and practice. Some regimes are hostile to minority or “unapproved” religions, while others tolerate, and thereby encourage, persecution or discrimination. Still other governments—including thriving and emerging democracies—have adopted discriminatory legislation or policies that give preference to favor some religions over others.

There are some governments that impose gratuitous and burdensome registration requirements on religious groups and forbid the groups from meeting, engaging in worship, or other basic religious activities until they have been registered. This requirement is, by its nature, subject to abuse by local jurisdictions, even in cases where it is designed by central authorities to be applied in a nondiscriminatory fashion. Neither should a legitimate concern over the destructive and unlawful behavior by a small number of groups be employed to discriminate against or stigmatize other peaceful and non-destructive members of the same religious group. This is a particular problem in some countries in Central Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East that place great restrictions on freedom of religion by narrowly defining what is acceptable and officially recognized religious practice. In addition, some Western European democracies have undertaken policies resulting in the stigmatization of minority religions by identifying them as dangerous “sects” or “cults.” This is also a concern because some countries in Central Asia and other regions have claimed to model their highly restrictive and repressive registration laws on Western European anti-cult legislation.

In analyzing conditions of religious freedom in countries around the world, this report seeks to document the effects of history, culture, and tradition. A particular religion may have dominated the life of a nation for centuries, making more difficult the acceptance of new faiths that offer challenges in both cultural and theological

terms. However, tradition and culture should not be used as a pretext for laws or policies that restrict genuine religious belief or its legitimate manifestation.

The U.S. Government continues to be greatly concerned by discrimination and violence against persons of all faiths and ethnic groups. Discrimination and violence against any peaceful person of faith violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the other international covenants that provide the basis for our advocacy on behalf of international religious freedom.

Anti-Semitism, for example, touches on both religious discrimination and ethnic discrimination, and it continues to be a problem of great concern to the U.S. Government and the international community. This year's report shows a disturbing increase in anti-Semitism in several European countries. To address this issue, a conference on anti-Semitism hosted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in Vienna in June, recognized anti-Semitism as a human rights issue.

Ultimately, each nation's policies and practices regarding religious freedom must be measured against international norms. The United States acknowledges its own responsibility with respect to these norms in the safeguarding and protection of religious liberty.

The Executive Summary consists of three parts. Part I identifies many of the countries where religious freedom is restricted and classifies their actions and policies into five categories. Part II provides examples of nations whose governments have taken significant steps to promote or protect religious freedom, even though serious problems may remain in those countries. Part III lists noteworthy actions the U.S. Government has taken to encourage other nations to promote religious freedom.

Readers should note that some countries are mentioned in more than one part of the summary, according to the type of action or situation being reported. Within Part I, several of the countries could be listed in more than one of the five categories; however, in the interest of brevity, a given country is listed only once, in the category that best characterizes the fundamental barriers to religious freedom in that country.

Part I: Barriers to International Religious Freedom

TOTALITARIAN OR AUTHORITARIAN ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR PRACTICE

Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes are defined by the high degree to which they seek to control thought and expression, especially dissent. Such regimes tend to regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of the religion's content, the fact that the very practice of religion threatens the dominant ideology (often by diverting the loyalties of adherents toward an authority beyond the state), the ethnic character of the religious group or groups, or a mixture of all three. When one or more of these elements is present, the result often is the suppression of religion by the regime.

Burma. The Government continued to view religious freedom in the context of threats to national unity. Through its pervasive internal security apparatus, the Government infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. It systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom, discouraged or prohibited minority religions from constructing new places of worship, and, in some ethnic minority areas, coercively promoted Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of the minority ethnic groups. Christian groups experienced increasing difficulties in obtaining permission to build new churches in most regions, while Muslims reported that they essentially were banned from constructing any new mosques, or expanding existing ones, anywhere in the country. Anti-Muslim violence continued to occur, and restrictions on Muslim travel as well as monitoring of Muslims' activities and worship countrywide have increased in recent years. The Government subjected all publications, including religious publications, to control and censorship, and generally prohibited outdoor meetings, including religious meetings, of more than five persons. Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement, including diplomatic travel, made it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in Burma, including freedom of religion.

China. Although the level of Government interference in religious activity varied widely from region to region, the Government continued its efforts to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship. Unregistered religious groups experienced varying degrees of official inter-

ference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups were subjected to restrictions, leading in some cases to intimidation, harassment, and detention. In some localities, “underground” religious leaders reported increased pressure to register either with the State Administration for Religious Activities or its provincial and local offices. They also reported facing pressure to be affiliated with and supervised by official party organizations linked to the legally recognized churches, in order to prevent their facilities from being closed. Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered churches, temples, and mosques, and the Central Government failed to stop these activities. Police closed underground mosques, temples and seminaries, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant “house churches,” many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources and networks. Many religious leaders and adherents were detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms. Local authorities also used an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups, whereby citizens may be sentenced by a non-judicial panel of police and local authorities to up to 3 years in reeducation-through-labor camps. Many religious detainees and prisoners were held in such facilities during the period covered by this report. The Government continued its repression of groups that it determined to be “cults” in general and of the Falun Gong in particular. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. In addition, teachers, professors and university students were not allowed to practice religion openly in Xinjiang. In Tibet, although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, activities perceived by the Government to be vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities believed to be advocating Tibetan independence or any form of separatism, were promptly and forcibly suppressed. Restrictions on religious practice and places of worship continued and the level of repression in Tibet remained high.

Cuba. The Government continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious institutions and activities, and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, religious professionals, and laypersons. State security officials visited some priests and pastors prior to significant religious events, ostensibly to warn them that dissidents were trying to “use the Church.” State security agents warned the wives of several political prisoners that they would be arrested if they joined other wives of political prisoners for Mass at Havana’s Santa Rita Catholic Church. The authorities ignored certain religious groups’ applications for legal recognition, thereby subjecting members of these groups to potential charges of illegal association, and continued to deny construction permits, forcing many churches to seek permits to meet in private homes. The process of obtaining a permit to repair existing places of worship and purchase construction materials was lengthy and expensive. Churches also were severely restricted in their ability to operate schools, train religious workers, and print religious material. Additionally, the Government denied access to the Internet to some religious groups.

Laos. The Government’s record on religious freedom continued to improve moderately in some parts of the country but deteriorated in other regions. The Lao Government continued to inhibit religious practice by all persons, especially those belonging to minority religions. There were scattered reports of local officials pressuring minority Christians to renounce their faith, and at least one instance of Christian villagers forced from their homes because of their religious beliefs. There were a number of instances of persons arrested for their religious practice, particularly in Savannakhet Province. The Government prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, and foreigners caught distributing religious material are subject to arrest or deportation.

North Korea. Genuine religious freedom does not exist. The Government continued to prohibit any religious activity except that of officially recognized groups controlled by the Government. Reports of executions, torture, and imprisonment of religious persons in the country continued to emerge. Religious and human rights groups outside of the country have provided numerous, usually unconfirmed reports that members of underground churches have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs. There were unconfirmed reports that persons who proselytized or who had ties to overseas Christian evangelical groups operating in the People’s Republic of China were severely punished. In April 1999 and also in May and June 2002, witnesses testified before Congress that prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally were treated worse than other inmates. While difficult to confirm, the collective weight of this anecdotal evidence lends credence to such reports.

Vietnam. The Government continued to place significant restrictions on publicly organized activities of religious groups not recognized by the Government, and on

actions by recognized groups that it considered to be at variance with state interests. Religious groups faced difficulties in training and ordaining clergy and encountered some restrictions in conducting educational and charitable activities. Officials reportedly attempted to force many Hmong and other ethnic minority Protestants in several northwestern provinces as well as many Montagnards in several Central Highland provinces to renounce their faith. According to credible reports, the police harassed and sometimes detained and beat religious believers, particularly in mountainous areas largely populated by ethnic minorities. The Government also reportedly destroyed or forced the demolition of a number of buildings used for worship in the Central Highlands. Government officials continued to restrict or supervise closely access to the Central and Northwest Highlands by diplomats, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and other foreigners, making it difficult to verify conditions in those areas.

STATE HOSTILITY TOWARD MINORITY OR NONAPPROVED RELIGIONS

Some governments, while not necessarily determined to implement a program of control over minority religions, nevertheless are hostile to certain ones or to factions of religious groups identified as “security threats.” These governments implement policies designed to intimidate certain groups, cause their adherents to convert to another faith, or cause their members to flee.

Iran. The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security continued to monitor religious activity closely. Members of the country’s religious minorities—including Baha’is, Jews, Christians, Sunni and Sufi Muslims—suffered varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, including intimidation, harassment, and imprisonment. They also complained of discrimination in the areas of employment, education, and housing. These repressive measures affected most acutely adherents of the Baha’i Faith, which the Government regards as a misguided or wayward Islamic sect with a political orientation antagonistic to the Iranian revolution. The Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians. The Government’s anti-Israel policies, along with a presumption among Muslim extremists that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their own country, created a threatening atmosphere for the small Jewish community. Laws based on religion were used to stifle freedom of expression. In November 2002, Iranian academic Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death for blasphemy, based on a speech in June 2002 in which he challenged Muslims not to blindly follow the clergy.

Iraq. (The following refers to the status of religious freedom under the Saddam Hussein regime.) As in previous years, the Saddam Hussein regime exercised repressive measures against any religious groups or organizations deemed as not providing full political and social support to the regime. The Government also continued its policy of repressing the Shi’a religious leadership. Although Shi’a Arabs are the largest religious group, Sunni Arabs dominated economic and political life. The Government severely restricted or banned outright many Shi’a religious practices, and for decades conducted a brutal campaign of murder, summary execution, arbitrary arrest, and protracted detention against the religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi’a Muslim population. The Government systematically killed senior Shi’a clerics, desecrated Shi’a mosques and holy sites, interfered with Shi’a religious education, and prevented Shi’a adherents from performing their religious rites. The Constitution did not provide for the recognition of Assyrians, Chaldeans, or Yazidis, and the Government sought to undermine the identity of minority Christian (Assyrian and Chaldean) and Yazidi groups.

Pakistan. The Government failed in many respects to protect the rights of religious minorities, due to both public policy and the Government’s unwillingness to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith. Discriminatory religious laws at the national level have added to an atmosphere of religious intolerance, which contributed to acts of violence directed against minority Muslim groups, as well as against Christians, Hindus, and members of Muslim offshoot groups, including the Ahmadis and Zikris. While the Government did not encourage sectarian violence, there were instances in which the Government failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups, particularly Shi’as. The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities.

Saudi Arabia. Freedom of religion does not exist. The Government continued to enforce a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam and suppress the public practice of other interpretations of Islam and non-Muslim religions. Muslims not adhering to the officially sanctioned version faced harassment at the hands of the Mutawwa’in (religious police). Members of the Shi’a minority faced political and eco-

conomic discrimination, including limited employment opportunities, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers. The Government continued to detain some Shi'a religious leaders and members of the Ismaili Shi'a community in Najran province. Non-Muslim worshippers risked arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes physical abuse for engaging in religious activity that attracted official attention. There were frequent instances in which mosque preachers, whose salaries are paid by the Government, used violently anti-Jewish and anti-Christian language in their sermons. The Government announced, however, that it had replaced more than 2,000 imams for extremist preaching. Hindus, regarded as polytheists, faced greater discrimination than Christians with respect to compensation for accidental death and injury.

Sudan. The Government continued its policy of Islamization, treating Islam as the state religion and relegating non-Muslims to de facto second-class citizenship. Registration was difficult for religious groups to obtain. The Government did not authorize the construction of any churches in the Khartoum area or in the district capitals. The assets of various Catholic relief projects were confiscated when the projects closed temporarily or moved locations. Government jobs and contracts were reserved almost exclusively for Muslims, and Muslims received preferential treatment for the limited services provided by the Government, including access to medical care. In May, the English-language daily Khartoum Monitor was suspended by the Government with the charge that writers covering a variety of religious issues had committed blasphemy. In 2002, the Armenian community imported a computerized printing press to publish religious material in Armenian; however, the Government has refused to license the press. Popular Defense Forces trainees were indoctrinated in the Islamic faith. In prisons and juvenile detention facilities, government officials and government-supported Islamic NGOs pressured non-Muslim inmates to convert. Non-Muslims faced hindrances in their efforts to proselytize. At the time of the issuance of this report, negotiations continued between the two sides to end the civil war.

Turkmenistan. The Government continued to restrict all forms of religious expression. Governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, interpreted the laws in such a way as to discriminate against those practicing any faith other than Sunni Islam or Russian Orthodox Christianity, which are controlled by the Government. The Government used the law to prevent all other religious groups from registering, including some with the required 500 members, and severely limited the activities of unregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials, and by restricting their freedom to meet and worship in private. Government harassment of nearly all unregistered religious groups lessened beginning in June 2002 but resumed in March 2003. Such harassment included detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and loss of jobs. The Government restricted the number of Muslim mosques, controlled and restricted access to Islamic education, and limited the number of people allowed to participate in the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The enforced use of President Niyazov's spiritual guide, "Rukhnama," in educational institutions, mosques, and Russian Orthodox churches constituted a restriction of freedom of thought, conscience and belief, as did the replacement of imams who did not cooperate with the elevation of Rukhnama to a place beside the Koran.

Uzbekistan. The Government permitted the existence of mainstream religions but invoked the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations to restrict the religious freedom of other groups. The Government continued its harsh campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups it suspected of extremist sentiments or activities, arresting numerous alleged members of these groups and sentencing them to lengthy jail terms after unfair trials. The rate of arrests of suspected extremists declined slightly but remains high, although 923 were released in the second large-scale amnesty in 2002. This repressive campaign led authorities to be highly suspicious of those who were among the most observant, including frequent mosque attendees, bearded men, and veiled women, creating a climate of intimidation and fear for some devout believers. Authorities harassed Christian groups with ethnic-Uzbek members. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations is not in keeping with international norms. The registration requirements for religious organizations are strict and burdensome, and a number of minority religious groups had difficulty satisfying them, thus forcing many groups to operate illegally and some clandestinely. Prohibited activities included organizing an illegal religious group, persuading others to join such a group, drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents, and even participating in a religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization. The Government

continued to prohibit proselytizing, ban religious subjects in public schools, prohibit the private teaching of religious principles, and require religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. There were stiff penalties for these activities. In a positive development, the Government submitted its law on religion to the Panel of Experts on Religion of the Office of Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

STATE NEGLECT OF THE PROBLEM OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST, OR PERSECUTION OF,
MINORITY OR NONAPPROVED RELIGIONS

In some countries, governments have laws or policies to discourage religious discrimination and persecution but fail to act with sufficient consistency and vigor against violations of religious freedom by nongovernmental entities or local law enforcement officials.

Bangladesh. Although citizens were generally free to practice the religion of their choice, police forces, commonly deemed ineffective in upholding law and order, were often slow to assist members of religious minorities who were victims of crimes. There continue to be instances of discrimination against Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities.

Egypt. The Government continued to prosecute persons, including Muslims, for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices under the charge of “insulting heavenly religions.” The law does not recognize the conversion of Muslims to other religions and such converts continued to face serious societal and administrative discrimination. The February retrial of 96 defendants who participated in the December 1999–January 2000 violence in Al Kush, which left 21 Christians and one Muslim dead, ended with the acquittal of 93 and the conviction of 3, but with no convictions for the deaths of the Christians. The approval process for church construction continued to be time-consuming and insufficiently responsive to the wishes of the Christian community. Christian representatives maintained that security forces blocked them from utilizing permits already issued, and that local security forces at times blocked or delayed permits for repairs to church buildings. The 1960 decree that banned Baha’i institutions and community activities and confiscated all Baha’i community properties was still in force.

Georgia. Attacks on religious minorities that included violence, illegal seizure of religious literature, and disruption of services and meetings, continued with near impunity. Local police and security officials failed to protect non-traditional religious minority groups and were complicit in several attacks against members of such groups. Police often failed to respond to continued attacks by Orthodox extremists, largely followers of excommunicated Orthodox priest Father Basil Mkalavishvili, against members of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other non-traditional religious minorities. Some nationalist politicians continue to use the issue of the supremacy of the Georgian Orthodox Church in their platforms and criticized some Protestant groups, especially evangelical groups, as subversive. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy generally failed to pursue effectively through the courts criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their attacks against religious minorities and their human rights advocates.

Guatemala. The Government has not implemented the 1995 Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which provides for the respect of spiritual rights of indigenous people. While there is no government policy of discrimination, a lack of resources and political will to enforce existing laws and implement the Peace Accords limits the free expression of indigenous religious practice. The Government has not provided mechanisms for free access to ceremonial sites considered sacred within indigenous culture, nor has the Government provided for the preservation or protection of such ceremonial sites as archaeological preserves. The Commission for the Definition of Sacred Places, established by the Government in October 2001, has not taken action to protect any specific sacred sites since its inception.

India. The Government at times failed to act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure resulted in part from the legal constraints inherent in the country’s federal structure, and in part from the law enforcement and justice systems, which at times are not effective. Two state-level anti-conversion laws were passed during the reporting period. The ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities may be seen by some extremists as a signal that such violence may be committed with impunity. As of the close of the reporting period, no convictions had been obtained in connection with the 2002 attacks in Gujarat, in which as many as 2,000 Muslims were killed. Victims of the Gujarat riots blamed Hindu nationalists for sabotaging efforts to prosecute Hindus involved in the riots.

Indonesia. The Government made considerable progress in some areas, such as reducing interreligious violence in the Maluku islands and Central Sulawesi, and arresting and prosecuting religious extremists for carrying out religiously motivated attacks. However, in several cases the Government failed to investigate and prosecute religious extremists responsible for murder and other crimes.

Nigeria. While the Federal Government generally respected religious freedom, there were some instances in which limits were placed on religious activity in order to address security and public safety concerns. Some state governments also restricted these rights in practice in certain respects. Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high in some areas of the country, and there were several violent ethno-religious conflicts. There was some societal discrimination against religious minorities. The extension of Shari'a law in many northern states continued to generate a public debate on whether Shari'a punishments such as amputation for theft, stoning for adultery, and caning for fornication and public drunkenness was constitutional.

DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION OR POLICIES DISADVANTAGING CERTAIN RELIGIONS

Some governments have implemented laws or regulations that favor certain religions and place others at a disadvantage. Often this circumstance results from the historical predominance of one religion in a country and may reflect broad social skepticism about new or minority religions. At times it stems from the emergence of a country from a long period of Communist rule, in which all religion was prohibited or, at best, out of favor. In such countries, skepticism or even the fear of certain religions or all religions lingers within segments of society. In some cases, this circumstance has led to a curtailment of religious freedom.

Belarus. The status of respect for religious freedom worsened during the period covered by this report. On October 31, 2002, the Government implemented a new law on religion, ignoring widespread domestic and foreign opposition and strongly restricting religious freedom, even for those groups specified as occupying a traditional place in society, the Belarusian Orthodox Church, Jews, Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Lutherans. On June 12, the Government and the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church, signed a Concordat that many consider to elevate the BOC's status, providing the Church with privileges not enjoyed by other faiths. Authorities continued to harass many other denominations and religions. The Government repeatedly rejected the registration applications of many Protestant denominations, the Belarusian Orthodox Autocephalous Church (BAOC), and some Eastern religions. The authorities continued to enforce a 1995 Cabinet of Ministers decree that restricts the activities of religious workers in an attempt to protect Belarus Orthodoxy and curtail the growth of other religions. During the period covered by this report, Protestant and other non-Russian Orthodox religious groups continued to come under attack in the government-run media.

Brunei. Practitioners of non-Muslim faiths were not allowed to proselytize, and Christian-based mission schools were not allowed to teach Christianity at school. All schools, including eight non-government Chinese schools and four Christian-based schools, were required to give instruction in the Islamic faith to all students. The Government used a range of municipal and planning legislation to restrict the expansion of all religions other than official Islam. The Government used zoning laws that prohibit the use of private homes as places of worship to deny permission to two Christian religious groups to register and worship collectively.

Eritrea. Respect for religious freedom continued to deteriorate during the period covered by this report. The Government harassed, arrested, and detained members of non-sanctioned Protestant religious groups locally referred to collectively as "Pentes," reform movements from and within the Coptic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and adherents of the Baha'i Faith. There were also numerous reports of forced recantations and physical torture. Only the four government-sanctioned religious groups—Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and members of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea—were allowed to meet freely. Following a May 2002 government decree that all religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, all religious facilities not belonging to the four sanctioned religious groups were closed. The Government failed to respond to applications of those groups that attempted to register.

Indonesia. The implementation of Shari'a law was a source of intense debate and concern, and many of the issues raised in this debate touched on religious freedom. In Aceh Province, the Government began the operational implementation of Shari'a, on March by presidential decree. Some citizens worried that implementation of Shari'a would provide new powers to already-discredited law enforcement institu-

tions and provide opportunities for the Government to intrude in private religious matters. As of the end of the reporting period, it was not yet clear whether Shari'a would apply to non-Muslims in the province. In June, the government also enacted a controversial education bill, which states that each student has the right to receive religious instruction by teachers of the same faith. The requirement to provide individualized religious education applies to both government and religious schools and was opposed by many Christian and moderate Muslim groups.

Israel and the Occupied Territories. Israel has a legal system that protects against religious discrimination. However, some non-Jews continued to experience discrimination in the areas of education, housing, employment, and social services. For example, schools in Arab areas, including Arab parochial schools, receive significantly fewer resources than comparable Jewish schools. Building codes for places of worship were selectively enforced based on religion. Governmental and societal discrimination against Israeli-Arabs continued during the period covered by this report, due primarily to Palestinian terrorist attacks, mostly in the form of suicide bombings, and the Government's military actions in the occupied territories, all of which resulted in some impediments to religious practice. The exclusive control of Orthodox Jewish religious authorities over Jewish marriages, divorces, and most burials was a source of serious controversy in society. Evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Reform and Conservative Jews complained of incidents of harassment, threats, and vandalism directed against their buildings and other facilities.

Malaysia. Islam is the official religion, although the constitution provides for freedom of religion. The Government considers adherence to Sunni Islam intrinsic to Malay ethnic identity; therefore, Sunni Islamic religious laws bind ethnic Malays, who represent approximately 55 percent of the population. The Government monitored the activities of the Shi'a minority and claimed the right to detain members of what it considers Islamic "deviant sects," i.e., groups that do not follow the official Sunni teachings. The right to leave the Islamic faith and adhere to another religion remained controversial, and in practice it was very difficult for Muslims to change religions. Non-Muslim religious minorities generally worship freely although with some restrictions, such as construction of places of worship and new cemeteries.

Moldova. Authorities in Transnistria, a separatist region not under the control of the Government, continued to impose registration requirements that negatively affected religious groups and continued to subject groups to official harassment. On the internationally recognized, Government-controlled part of Moldova, there is no state religion. However, the Moldovan Orthodox Church receives some special treatment from the Moldovan Government. The Government refused to register some religious groups, such as the Spiritual Organization of Muslims. On the positive side, the Parliament amended the Law on Religions in 2002 to simplify the registration process, and, after 10 years of refusals, the Government finally registered the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (the Bessarabian Orthodox Church).

Russia. Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for the majority of individuals; however, some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations," which seriously disadvantages religious groups new to the country, eased during the period covered by this report. However, several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience provided a basis for actions that restricted religious freedom for several groups. In particular those aspects allowing the State to ban religious organizations, requiring organizations to reregister, and establishing procedures for their liquidation were most troublesome. Critics also cited provisions that not only limited the rights of religious "groups" but also required that religious groups exist for 15 years before they could qualify for "organization" status as problematic for some evangelical Christians. Moreover, there were indications that the security services were increasingly treating the leadership of some minority religious groups, especially those with organizational ties outside the country, as security threats. After the enactment of a new "Law on Foreigners" and subsequent amendments starting in November 2002, religious workers began reporting difficulty obtaining visas with terms longer than 3 months. Authorities denied or cancelled visas for some Protestant clergy, the Buddhist Dalai Lama, and a number of Roman Catholic priests, as well as for the Bishop for 40,000 Roman Catholics in the Far East. Many government officials, along with other citizens, continued to equate Russian Orthodoxy with Russian nationhood, and available information indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church appeared to receive more favorable treatment than other denominations. Local officials, reportedly sometimes influenced by close relations with local Russian Orthodox Church authorities, either refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. Some local governments also prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large

gatherings and either refused permission to construct places of worship or withdrew previously granted permits.

Turkey. The debate continued over the State's definition of "secularism," which is seen by the Government historically and currently as the proper role of religion in society. Restrictions continued on non-Muslim religious groups and on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, usually for the stated reason of preserving the secular State. State authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious dress in state facilities, including universities, schools, and workplaces. Some Muslims, Christians, and Bahá'ís faced some restrictions and occasional harassment, including detentions for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings.

STIGMATIZATION OF CERTAIN RELIGIONS BY WRONGFULLY ASSOCIATING THEM WITH DANGEROUS "CULTS" OR "SECTS"

There continues to be concern that some Western European countries pursue restrictive legislation and practices that stigmatize minority religions by associating them with dangerous "cults."

Belgium. Some religious groups included in an unofficial 1997 parliamentary list continue to complain that their inclusion has resulted in discriminatory action against them. In July 2003, a report issued by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights asserted that the Belgian government had not taken any effective measures to counteract the hostility and discrimination suffered by members of religious groups depicted as "sects."

France. Some observers remained concerned about the June 2001 About-Picard Law; however, by the end of the reporting period, no cases had been brought under the law. In November 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution inviting the Government to reconsider the About-Picard Law and to clarify certain terms in the law. Some groups included in the 1996 parliamentary report on cults continue to allege instances of discrimination.

Germany. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) and most state OPCs continued to monitor the Church of Scientology, notwithstanding the fact that the Church and its members have not been found to be involved in any criminal activity during the last six years of state observation. The Government's stated reason for observation has been that Scientology poses a threat to the democratic constitutional order. In August 2002, the federal Interior Ministry extended its immigration exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor visa) against the founder of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myong Moon, and his wife, Hak Ja Har Moon. The couple has been refused entry to the country (and through the Schengen Treaty visa ineligibility, to other Schengen countries) since 1995, when the Chief Office for Border Security issued a notice of refusal of entry for an initial period of 3 years. The stated reason for refusal of entry was that Reverend Moon and his wife were considered by the federal government to be leaders of a "sect" that endangered the personal and social development of young people; therefore, their entry to the country would not be in the national interest. The Government had extended the refusal of entry repeatedly, and was the only European country to extend the ban last August for a period of 2 years, citing only the original basis for the refusal.

Part II: Significant Improvement in the Area of Religious Freedom

The International Religious Freedom Act prescribes a section of the Executive Summary that identifies countries in which there has been a "significant improvement in the protection and promotion" of religious freedom and includes a description of the nature of the improvement as well as an analysis of the factors contributing to it.

Kazakhstan. The overall status of religious freedom improved in Kazakhstan during the period covered by the report. President Nazarbayev began an initiative to promote dialog among religions; an international conference drawing regional dignitaries and religious figures was held in February. Following the Constitutional Council's April 2002 determination that restrictive amendments to the National Religion Law were unconstitutional, no further attempts have been made to amend the legislation. Instances of harassment of religious organizations by local officials, including legal actions against the Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists, decreased during the period covered by this report.

Laos. Although the Lao Government continued to inhibit religious practice overall, the Lao Government made some significant improvements. In most provinces incidents of arrests of religious leaders declined, there were no reports of new church closings, and other acts of abuse of Christian minorities, such as village expulsions, were limited to a small number of areas. In addition, several long-closed churches,

especially in Vientiane Province, were allowed to reopen. In general, the Government appeared sincere in its efforts to promote conciliation between religious faiths and displayed greater tolerance for the Lao Evangelical Church. Government officials made frequent trips to provinces experiencing problems of religious intolerance towards Christians in order to instruct local officials on respecting the activities of Christian congregations under Lao law. On several occasions a senior member of the Politburo traveled to the provinces to instruct local and provincial officials on the need for greater tolerance of minority religious practice.

Part III: U.S. Actions to Promote International Religious Freedom

Promoting religious freedom is a core goal of U.S. foreign policy, and U.S. officials around the world play active roles in this advocacy. Throughout the world, our overseas diplomatic missions are our front line in promoting the right of religious freedom and opposing violations of that right. Equally important is the tone and context set by senior U.S. officials when they speak publicly on the subject of religious freedom or privately with foreign heads of government and other policy makers.

President Bush has made it clear that he views religious freedom as a fundamental and inviolate human right and has repeatedly emphasized the importance the United States places on protecting this fundamental freedom. In October 2002, President Bush met with then-President Jiang Zemin and called for greater religious tolerance in China, repeating an appeal he had made in February of that year in Beijing. In proclaiming January 16 Religious Freedom Day in the United States, he said, "The right to believe and express one's beliefs in words and in practice is a right that should belong to all people."

Secretary of State Colin Powell has frequently called attention to the positive effect of religious diversity in the U. S. In an interview with Al-Ahram on Feb. 10, he echoed this by noting the "strength of all the religions of the world when they harness together in peace." Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage raised religious freedom issues with government officials in China during summit preparations. At the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the U.S. supported a resolution on religious freedom, including the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance. During the same session, Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick denounced violations of religious freedom in Iran, Iraq, China, Belarus, and Sudan.

In December's U.S.-China Human Rights Dialog that took place in Beijing and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Lorne Craner, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and John Hanford, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, stressed the importance of religious freedom in the relationship between the two countries.

During the period covered by this report, members of the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to several countries, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Egypt, Georgia, India, Italy, Russia, Uzbekistan, Sudan, and Vietnam, to promote religious freedom.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act mandates presidential action in cases of particularly egregious violations of religious freedom. Thus in March 2003, the Secretary of State, acting under the authority of the President, re-designated six countries—Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Sudan—as "countries of particular concern" under the Act for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

This section highlights U.S. Government actions in selected countries. Further details may be found in the individual country chapters.

Afghanistan. The Ambassador at Large and other U.S. Government officials have urged Afghan officials to include protections to religious freedom in the Constitution. Embassy representatives met regularly with religious and minority figures in an ongoing dialog regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction. The U.S. also worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance. A grant from U.S. Embassy Kabul was used to fund a monthly magazine designed to challenge "religious despotism" and to promote a tolerant interpretation of Islam.

Belarus. In October, the Department sent an officer to Minsk to protest the new restrictive law on religion. In November, the Department of State issued a public statement criticizing the passage of the law, citing the law's numerous restrictive elements. The U.S. Embassy released public statements condemning the passage of the law and called upon the Government to ensure that all citizens have the right

to worship freely. The U.S. delegation to the OSCE criticized the Government's poor religious freedom record in an October 2002 public statement.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. The U.S. Ambassador met frequently with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work toward moderation and multiethnicity. The Ambassador has been involved actively as a member of the Srebrenica Foundation for the Memorial and Cemetery dedicated to victims of the 1995 massacre of Muslims in Potocari. The Embassy severely criticized instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encouraged leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to oppose publicly such attacks. The U.S. Agency for International Development provided funding to train lawyers and judges on human rights, including religious freedom.

Burma. U.S. Embassy personnel promoted religious freedom with government officials, private citizens, scholars, and representatives of foreign governments, media and businesses. As a key part of the Embassy's reporting and public diplomacy activities, Embassy staff met repeatedly with leaders of Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic religious groups, including ethnic minority religious leaders, faculty members of theological schools, and other religious-affiliated organizations and NGOs.

The United States has discontinued bilateral aid to the Government, suspended issuance of licenses to export arms, and suspended the generalized system of preferences and Export-Import Bank financial services in support of U.S. exports to the country. The U.S. Government also has suspended all Overseas Private Investment Corporation financial services, ended active promotion of trade, and halted issuances of visas to high government officials and their immediate family members. It also has opposed all assistance to the Government by international financial institutions and urged the governments of other countries to take similar actions. New investment in the country by U.S. citizens has been illegal since 1997. For the fourth consecutive year, the Secretary of State designated Burma a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

China. The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy and the Consulates General regularly encouraged greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country. On numerous occasions, both the Department of State and the Embassy in Beijing protested Government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, and Christian clergy and believers. The Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, accompanied by the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, attended the U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing. Religious freedom was a major agenda item. The Department of State brought Chinese religious leaders and scholars to the U.S. on International Visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U.S. society. The Embassy also brought experts on religion from the U.S. to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

In 2003 the Secretary of State designated China as a "country of particular concern" for the fourth consecutive time.

Georgia. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with senior government officials, including the President, Parliament Speaker, Internal Affairs and Justice Ministers, and the Prosecutor General. Embassy attendance at the trial of excommunicated Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili, charged with inciting violence against religious minorities, was instrumental in its moving forward. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, frequently met with representatives of the Government, Parliament, various religious confessions, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom issues. The Ambassador at Large on International Religious Freedom met with officials from the Georgia Government about ending religious violence. In May, a visiting official from his office met with members of the Government, various religious confessions, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom issues and underscored the need for the Government to end religious violence.

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Germany. The status of Scientology was the subject of many discussions during the period covered by this report. The U.S. Government expressed its concerns over infringement of individual rights because of religious affiliation and over the potential for discrimination in international trade posed by the screening of foreign firms for possible Scientology affiliation. Mission officers facilitated contacts between the country's Scientologists and government officials as they took the first steps toward

a dialog and encouraged the Government to designate an ombudsman, or central point of contact, for Scientology matters with whom U.S. officials and Scientologists themselves can carry on a more intensive dialog on the status of Scientology.

In response to anti-Semitic crimes, members of the U.S. Mission closely followed the German Government's responses and officially expressed the U.S. Government's opposition to anti-Semitism. Mission officers maintained contacts with Jewish groups and continued to monitor closely the incidence of anti-Semitic activity.

India. The U.S. Embassy continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates regularly met with religious leaders from all significant minority communities, as well NGO representatives, and reported on events and trends that affect religious freedom. In May 2002, a representative from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to Gujarat, Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country.

The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials publicly expressed regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, extended condolences to the victims, and urged all parties to resolve their difference peacefully. In addition, the USAID office provided funding for an NGO program designed to assist internally displaced persons in Gujarat. U.S. officials from the Consulate General in Mumbai traveled to Ahmedabad within days of the start of the violence in Gujarat, to meet with officials and private citizens about the violence and continued to have contact during the period covered by this report. Consulate officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the violence in Gujarat. Officials from the U.S. Consulate in Chennai were active in assisting missionary Joseph Cooper following the attack on him by Hindu extremists. U.S. officials continued to engage state officials on the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws.

Indonesia. The U.S. Government provided grants to local NGOs and international organizations to assist the Indonesian government in helping victims of interreligious violence, particularly those displaced by conflicts. Through the Asia Foundation, the U.S. Government provided funding to Baku Bae Maluku, a local NGO, to evaluate efforts of Muslim and Christian lawyers in Maluku to resolve communal conflicts, and to take stock of lessons learned. Also through the Foundation, the U.S. Government provided funding to Desantara, another local NGO, to ensure the protection of religious minorities in Cigugur, West Java, and to prevent religious conflict there. The U.S. Embassy expanded its outreach to the Muslim community, selecting dozens of scholars from Islamic institutions and influential journalists for visits to the U.S. and giving Muslim television viewers exposure to the principles that guide religious freedom in the U.S.

Iran. While the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran, the United States made clear its objections to the Government's treatment of religious minorities and other restrictions on religious freedom through public statements, support for relevant U.N. and non-governmental organization efforts, and diplomatic initiatives with other states concerned about religious freedom in Iran. The U.S. State Department vice-spokesman on numerous occasions raised concerns about the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities. The U.S. Government encouraged other governments to make similar statements and urged those governments to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Iranian Government.

In 2003 the Secretary of State designated Iran as a "country of particular concern" for the fourth consecutive time.

Iraq. Prior to the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the United States had no diplomatic relations with Iraq and thus was unable to raise directly with the Government the problems of severe restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights abuses. In early 2003, the U.S. Secretary of State designated Iraq a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for the Saddam Hussein Government's severe violations of religious freedom. The country was similarly designated in 1999, 2000 and 2001. A U.S.-led coalition overthrew the Baathist regime in Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 9, 2003.

Since the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority in May, the U.S. Government has discussed the importance of protecting religious freedom with the people and with leaders, from all ethnic backgrounds and faith traditions, involved in charting the path to a new constitutional system. It is the policy of the Coalition Provisional Authority to help the Iraqi people create a democratic, representative government that respects the fundamental rights of all its citizens, irrespective of ethnicity or faith. In April, close to 1.5 million Shi'a Muslims participated in the Ashura pilgrimage.

Laos. The U.S. Ambassador visited several problem areas to observe the situation of religious freedom firsthand. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials persistently raised both, general religious freedom concerns and specific cases of abuse with senior Lao officials. The Embassy maintained an ongoing dialog with the Department of Religious Affairs in the Lao Front for National Construction and informed officials of specific cases of arrest or harassment. The Embassy hosted the visit of a member of the U.S. Congress and supported and encouraged the visits of recognized U.S. NGOs devoted to promoting religious freedom.

Nigeria. U.S. Embassy officials regularly discussed religious freedom issues with federal, state, and local officials, and also prominent citizens, including representatives of Muslim and Christian communities. The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy and in statements from officials in Washington, sought to encourage a peaceful resolution of the question regarding Shari'a criminal penalties in a way that would be compatible with recognized international human rights norms and urged that human rights and religious freedom be respected in all instances.

The U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives created programs for conflict resolution training that it continued to implement, targeting several Muslim communities. The American Speaker Program has been particularly effective in promoting dialog and informing local audiences about religious freedom in the U.S. The Embassy also continued publishing its informational magazine in Hausa, the language of the predominantly Muslim north. In January, as part of the Embassy's efforts to engage Islamic opinion leaders, a forum initiated by the Emir of Kano brought together U.S. Embassy officials and five U.S. speakers with Muslim leaders for dialog on Islam, poverty alleviation, and other foreign policy issues.

North Korea. The United States does not have diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea but pursues improvements in religious freedom through a variety of means. During talks in Pyongyang in October 2002, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James A. Kelly highlighted U.S. concerns about the regime's deplorable record on human rights and religious freedom. The U.S. regularly raised these concerns about North Korea in multilateral fora and bilaterally with other governments. U.S. officials urged other countries to condition their bilateral relations with North Korea on concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvements. At the 59th session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the U.S. Government worked to achieve passage for the first time of a resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea, including the regime's deplorable record on religious freedom. U.S. policy allows U.S. citizens to travel to the country, and a number of churches and religious groups organized efforts to alleviate suffering caused by shortages of food and medicine.

The Secretary of State again designated North Korea a "country of particular concern" in 2003.

Pakistan. U.S. Embassy officials attended the trials of several individuals charged with blasphemy, including the trial of Dr. Younis Sheikh, and encouraged government officials to pursue aggressive investigations of incidents involving the bombing of churches. The Embassy also assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up on specific cases involving religious minorities. Through the International Visitor Program, the Embassy sponsored several academics to travel to the United States to take part in programs that focus on religious freedom and pluralism. The United States has urged the Government to address extremist elements of some madrassas.

Russia. U.S. officials regularly meet with Government officials to press for protections to religious freedom. Consular officers raised the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy officers also met with missionaries during regional travel in the country's interior. On December 20, the Ambassador held a meeting with Minister of Justice Yuriy Chayka and expressed concern over the inconsistent application of registration requirements by regional MOJ officials. In November, the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted a reception for fifty religious workers and government officials to focus on religious freedom issues.

In October and again in May, an officer from Washington with responsibilities for religious freedom visited Moscow to hold meetings with religious and human rights groups. On November 7, 11 members of the United States Helsinki Commission and 6 members of Congress urged President Putin to correct a pattern of religious discrimination in the denial of visas to foreign religious workers from targeted minority faiths. In January, the U.S. Government's International Visitor program, focusing on religious freedom, sent Russian local, regional, and federal officials to the U.S. on the program "Promoting Dialog and tolerance across Ethnic Lines."

Sudan. U.S. Government officials made clear to the Sudanese government that the problem of religious freedom is one of the key impediments to an improvement in the relationship between the two countries. High-level U.S. officials and U.S. missions to international fora have raised consistently the issue of religious freedom with both the Government and the public. Ambassador Hanford met with Sudanese officials promote religious freedom. The Embassy consistently raised the issue at all levels of the Government, including with the President and the Foreign Minister. The U.S. Embassy and the Department of State forcefully raised religious freedom issues publicly in press statements and at international fora, including the U.N. Human Rights Commission. The Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan, John Danforth, met with religious leaders during his visits to the country and pressed for religious freedom. In October 2002, a representative from the Office of International Religious Freedom met with Sudanese religious leaders in Khartoum and Nairobi to discuss religious freedom in the country.

U.S. diplomatic efforts to bring about peace in the country have continued to focus on promoting religious dialog. The U.S. Embassy has enlisted the help of organizations such as the Sudan Council of Churches and the Sudan Inter-religious Council to this end, and also has maintained and developed relationships with religious leaders from both Muslim and Christian traditions.

In 2003 the Secretary of State designated Sudan a "country of particular concern" for the fourth consecutive time.

Saudi Arabia. The U.S. Government continued its policy of pressing the Government to honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, and promote tolerance toward non-Muslims. The U.S. Ambassador called for increased respect for religious minorities in the country, and Embassy officers met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials to deliver and discuss the 2002 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. Senior U.S. Embassy officers called on the Government to respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the Salafi tradition of Islam. Senior Embassy officials also protested the raids on private homes and detention of Christian worshipers in Riyadh, contributing to the successful release of several Christian prisoners in September 2002. The U.S. Government also facilitated the resettlement of a former Christian prisoner so that he would avoid facing persecution if deported to his country of origin.

Turkmenistan. In November 2002, the U.S. Ambassador urged the Government to release imprisoned Jehovah's Witness Kurban Zakirov and others in the December 2002 presidential amnesty. The Ambassador and Embassy officers raised specific reports of abuse and urged greater respect for religious freedom in encounters with members of the Council on Religious Affairs. In meetings with the Foreign Minister, the Ambassador also raised specific reports and urged ending numerically based registration for religious minority groups. The Ambassador and Embassy officers met regularly with the staff of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Center in Ashgabat and other diplomatic missions to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom. With the support of the State Department, in April 2003 the UNCHR passed a resolution condemning human rights violations, mentioning religious freedom.

Uzbekistan. Members of Congress and other high level U.S. legislative and executive branch officials met with Uzbek officials abroad and in the country to express the strong U.S. position on human rights, including its stance on freedom of religious expression. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and Uzbek officials to discuss specific issues of religious freedom. Officials in Washington, including the Ambassador at Large, met on several occasions with Uzbek Embassy officials to convey U.S. concerns regarding the state of religious freedom. Department officials traveled around the country meeting with religious leaders and groups as well as with government officials.

Vietnam. The U.S. Government commented publicly on the status of religious freedom in the country on several occasions. In a visit to the country in August 2002, Ambassador Hanford raised with high-level Government officials concerns about religious prisoners, conditions of religious freedom in the Central and Northwest Highlands, restrictions on the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), and other restrictions faced by major religious communities. In their representations to the Government, the Ambassador and other Embassy and Consulate General officers urged recognition of a broad spectrum of religious groups, including members of the UBCV, Protestant house churches, and dissenting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. They also urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups. During the November 2002 Human Rights Dialog, Ambassador Hanford raised a wide range of religious freedom concerns with Vietnamese officials. Embassy and Consulate Gen-

eral officials also focused on specific abuses and restrictions on religious freedom. Officers from the Embassy and the Consulate General met on several occasions with leaders of major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Muslims, and Hindus. When traveling in the provinces, Embassy and Consulate General officers took special efforts to meet with local Religious Affairs Committees, village elders, local clergy, and worshippers.