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**ANNUAL REPORT ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM 2002**

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
OF THE
U.S. SENATE
AND THE
COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
OF THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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.

JOSEPH R. BIDEN, Jr.,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations.

HENRY HYDE,
Chairman, Committee on International Relations.

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, DC, *October 7, 2002.*

Hon. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, Jr.,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,
U.S. Senate.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN:

On behalf of Secretary of State Colin Powell, I am very pleased to transmit to Congress the *Annual Report on Religious Freedom 2002*. This report is prepared in compliance with Section 102 of the International Religious Freedom Act. It covers events from July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002.

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, Legislative Affairs.

Enclosure.

PREFACE

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2002

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." This Annual Report includes 195 reports on countries worldwide.

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 2002 Report covers the period from July 1, 2001, to June 30, 2002, 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, monitor elections, and 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 in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, working 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 their own sources of information. These included 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. Government'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

Religious freedom, one of the most fundamental of human rights, is a liberty long championed by the United States and cherished by the American people. It is the policy of the United States Government to promote religious freedom worldwide, for every human being, regardless of religion, race, culture or nationality. Our policy is designed to encourage other nations to adhere to international standards of human rights and to promote fundamental U.S. concerns and values. While historically part of our overall human rights policy, the promotion of religious liberty as a foreign policy goal was given increased emphasis with the passage of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, which mandated this Annual Report.

THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

There are several reasons why the United States promotes religious freedom. First, the quest for religious liberty has played an integral part in American history. Early in our nation's founding, the view that every human being has a fundamental right to believe, worship and practice according to his or her own conscience became a core conviction of the American people. Religious liberty is the first of the enumerated rights in our Constitution, and is known as "the first freedom," because the founders believed it to be a lynchpin of democracy and the other fundamental human rights.

Its realization was not easily achieved. Today Americans enjoy religious freedom, but it was not always so. Our history is not perfect, and 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. Indeed, as in past centuries, many of those who champion this liberty most passionately are new Americans who arrived as refugees fleeing religious persecution in their native lands.

Second, religious freedom is universal in its importance and applicability. It is one of those "unalienable rights" acknowledged in our own Declaration of Independence—a right not granted by governments, but rather the birthright of every human being, in every nation and every culture. This truth is acknowledged in the most important of all the international human rights instruments, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which notes that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Accordingly, all are endowed with the right to "freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

Implicit in this language is a concept vital to the acceptance of human rights, including religious liberty. It is the belief in a common human nature that transcends cultural, racial, religious and other distinctions. The United Nations representatives of 1948 had witnessed in Nazism, and to a lesser extent in colonial regimes, a malevolent focus on racial and cultural differences. They were determined to articulate the existence of a human family comprised of persons equally endowed with dignity and worth irrespective of race, culture, religion, income or any other distinction.

Third, the promotion of religious freedom is intimately connected to the promotion of other fundamental human and civil rights, as well as to the growth of democracy. A government that acknowledges and protects freedom of religion and conscience is one that understands the inherent and inviolable dignity of the human person. Such a government is far more likely to protect, through rule of law, the other rights fundamental to human dignity, such as freedom from arbitrary arrest or seizure, or freedom from torture and murder.

Such a government is also more likely to protect the rights most closely associated with religious freedom, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and the rights of parents to raise their children in their faith. 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. More democracy means greater stability and economic prosperity.

Finally, U.S. religious freedom policy is a means of fighting the war on terrorism. The events of September 11, 2001 have had significant implications for that policy. The attacks by Al Qaeda highlighted the reality that people can and do exploit religion for terrible purposes, in some cases manipulating and destroying other human beings as mere instruments in the process. This is, unfortunately, not a new phenomenon in human affairs. In the post Cold War world, some scholars are predicting that religious differences are likely to be a cause of major conflicts between civilizations.

Whether such theories are borne out or not, 9/11 has raised the stakes for U.S. religious freedom policy. To the extent that policy succeeds, it will provide one of the most effective and sustainable antidotes, not only to religious persecution and discrimination, but also to religion-based violence and a potential “clash of civilizations.”

The reason is straightforward: where governments protect religious freedom, and citizens value it as a social good, religious persecution and religion-based violence find no warrant. Such societies not only tolerate religious differences, but many of its members see the exercise of religious devotion as constitutive of human freedom and dignity. They understand, as President Bush has stressed both here and abroad, that religious faith at its best yields productive, charitable citizens and stable societies. They also understand that to deprive persons of the right to religious liberty is to deny them their humanity in the most profound sense. At the heart of liberty is the right to ask the fundamental questions about the origins, nature, value and destiny of human life, and to worship and live in accord with the obligations that ensue.

THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom has now completed its fourth year. Formed in the summer of 1998, the Office has the 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 promoting other fundamental U.S. interests, such as protecting other core human rights, encouraging the development of mature democracies, and fighting 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 NGO's; and meetings with victims of persecution. Often the Ambassador and staff, along with other U.S. officials, engage in direct intervention in a particular crisis 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 actions, however, must necessarily remain out of the spotlight in order to protect those involved.

THE ANNUAL REPORT

The mission of the Ambassador at Large was framed by the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act of 1998, which also prescribed the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, of which this is the fourth edition. The purpose of the Annual Report is 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 three editions have generally been criticized by violator governments, but hailed by human rights NGO's as the standard worldwide reference on religious persecution.

As I begin 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 bipartisan and deep 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 exemplary.

This fourth Annual Report on International Religious Freedom is submitted in furtherance of our goal of promoting and protecting religious freedom for all.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Today there are several international agreements obligating nations to respect religious freedom. (See Appendix B.) The vast majority of the world’s governments have committed themselves through these agreements to protect the right of religious freedom for everyone who lives within their respective borders.

And yet, despite these widely accepted international instruments protecting religious freedom, there remains in some countries a substantial difference between commitment and practice. Much of the world’s population lives in countries in which the right to religious freedom is restricted or prohibited. This unacceptable gap between word and deed is explainable at several levels.

The most troubling explanation is the continued existence of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes that are determined to control religious belief and practice. The result is persecution. Some regimes are hostile to minority or “unapproved” religions, while others tolerate, and thereby encourage, persecution or discrimination. Although acts of violence against religious minorities may have several causes—for example, ethnicity or a perceived security threat—multicausality does not necessarily diminish the significance of religion. Some governments—often either democratic or aspiring to democracy—have adopted discriminatory legislation or policies that give preference to favored religions while disadvantaging others.

Some democratic states in Western Europe have undertaken policies resulting in the stigmatization of minority religions, the result of identifying them indiscriminately and often inaccurately with dangerous “sects” or “cults.” These practices are particularly troubling in that other nations struggling toward democracy, as well as certain non-democratic states, are adopting “anti-cult” laws and policies that are based in part on those of Western Europe. In non-democratic nations, lacking a tradition of commitment to human rights and rule of law, “anti-cult” laws could easily be implemented in ways that result in the persecution of people of faith.

The practice of requiring religious groups to register before they can engage in activities such as worship 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 non-discriminatory fashion. Nor should a legitimate concern over the destructive and unlawful behavior by a small number of groups be employed so indiscriminately that religions are wrongfully stigmatized.

This report does not neglect the effect of history, culture, and tradition on religious freedom policies. 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. International covenants allow legal restrictions on religious practice, but they must be applied scrupulously and fairly, in as limited a way as possible, without discriminating among religions.

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 steps to promote or protect religious freedom, even though in most cases serious problems remain in those countries. Part III illustrates 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 generally infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. The Government subjected all publications, including religious publications, to control and censorship and sometimes prohibited outdoor meetings. Government authorities continued to show preference for Theravada Buddhism, the majority religion, while at the same time controlling the organization and restricting the activities and expression of its clergy. The Government systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom, discouraged and sometimes prohibited minority religions from constructing new places of worship, and in some areas coercively promoted Buddhism over other religions. There were credible reports that the country's armed forces forcibly converted hundreds of Christian tribal Nagas to Buddhism. Anti-Muslim violence continued, and there were reports that restrictions on Muslim travel and worship increased.

China. Unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny and, in some cases, harsh repression. The Government continued to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship, and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups to prevent the rise of possible sources of authority outside of the control of the Government. The Government continued, and in some places intensified, a national campaign to enforce regulations that require all places of religious activity to register with government religious affairs bureaus and come under the supervision of official, "patriotic" religious organizations. As in past years, the Government moved against houses of worship outside its control that grew too large or espoused beliefs that it considered threatening to state security. Police closed "underground" mosques, temples, and seminaries, as well as large numbers of Catholic churches, and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks, and banned groups that it considered to be "cults." Leaders of unauthorized groups, in particular, are often the targets of harassment, interrogation, detention, and physical abuse, including torture. Members of these groups also may be subject to such treatment. The Government continued its harsh repression of Falun Gong and other groups that it considered "heretical cults." Various sources report that thousands of Falun Gong adherents have been arrested, detained, and imprisoned, and that several hundred Falun Gong adherents have died in detention since 1999. In Tibet, the level of religious repression remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor. Religious practice faced ongoing restrictions, but overall these restrictions were less harshly enforced than during the previous year. Police continued their crackdown on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Some Uighurs and other Muslims accused the

Government of using the ongoing war against terrorism as an excuse to intensify the repression of religious activity in Xinjiang.

Cuba. The Government continued its efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion. Citizens worshiping in officially sanctioned churches often were subject to surveillance by state security forces. The Government refused to register most new denominations, and unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference, harassment, and repression. Although it is legal to construct new churches, the Government rarely authorized such construction, forcing many churches to seek permits to meet in private homes. The ability of churches to run schools, train religious workers, and print religious material was either prohibited or severely restricted.

Laos. In spite of some limited improvements, religious freedom continued to be restricted. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and the Government maintained their narrow interpretation of the constitutional provision for religious freedom, thus inhibiting religious practice by all persons, especially those belonging to minority religions, particularly Christianity, that fall outside of the mainstream Buddhism. Although official pronouncements accept the existence of different religions, they emphasize the potential to divide, distract, or destabilize. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practiced their faith in an atmosphere in which the application of the law was arbitrary. Many officials appeared to interpret the constitution to prohibit any religious activities involving proselytizing or conversion, and to view Christianity in particular, as creating societal divisions. Officials in some localities continued to attempt to force believers to renounce their faith. Government authorities closed several dozen churches, but a small number of other churches that had been closed in recent years were allowed to reopen. There were 19 known religious prisoners or detainees, all Christians, at the end of the period covered by this report. (Note: Nine of these prisoners were released in July, soon after the end of the reporting period.)

North Korea. The Government continued to suppress organized religious activity except that of officially recognized groups linked to the Government. Faith-based and human rights groups outside the country provided numerous reports that members of underground churches have been beaten, arrested, or killed. Witnesses have testified that prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally received harsher treatment than that of other inmates. Those who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border with China appear to have been arrested and subjected to harsh penalties, including death, according to several reports. While difficult to confirm, the collective weight of anecdotal evidence of harsh treatment of unauthorized religious activity lends credence to such reports.

Vietnam. The Government continued to restrict activities of religious groups that it declared to be at variance with state laws and policies. Restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of such groups remained in place, and the Government maintained supervisory control of the recognized religions. Groups faced difficulties in training and ordaining clergy, and in conducting educational and humanitarian activities. There were credible reports that in past years Hmong Protestant Christians in several northwestern villages were forced by local authorities to recant their faith. Hmong Protestants were also charged with practicing religion illegally and jailed for up to 3 years for "abusing freedom of speech, press, or religion." There were reports that officials fabricated evidence, and that some of the provisions of the law used to convict religious prisoners contradicted international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to credible reports, the police arbitrarily detained persons based on their religious beliefs and practice, particularly in the mountainous, ethnic minority 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. Government actions continued to create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities. All such groups suffered varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing. The Government fueled anti-Baha'i and anti-Jewish sentiment for political purposes. Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Mandaeans, and Sufi Muslims reported imprisonment,

harassment, or intimidation based on their religious beliefs. At least four Baha'is were among those still imprisoned for reasons related to their faith, while eight Jews remained in prison after being convicted for cooperating with a hostile government, belonging to an illegal organization, and recruiting members in an illegal organization. The property rights of Baha'is generally were disregarded. Laws based on religion were used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines were closed and leading publishers and journalists imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic."

Iraq. The Government continued its systematic and vicious policies against Shi'as. It severely restricted or banned many Shi'a religious practices and conducted—as it has for decades—a brutal campaign of murder, summary execution, arbitrary arrest, and protracted detention against Shi'a religious leaders and adherents. The regime has desecrated Shi'a mosques and holy sites, disrupted Shi'a religious ceremonies, and interfered with Shi'a religious education. It has banned the broadcast of Shi'a programs on government-controlled radio or television and the publication of Shi'a books. There were also reports that the Government engaged in various abuses against the country's Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, especially in terms of forced movements from northern areas and repression of political rights.

Pakistan. The Government failed to protect the rights of religious minorities, due both to public policy and to its unwillingness to take action against societal forces hostile to those that practice a different faith. Acts of sectarian and religious violence continued during the period covered by this report. The worst religious violence was directed against the country's Shi'a minority, who continued to be disproportionately victimized in individual and mass killings. The practice of the Ahmadi faith continued to be restricted severely by law, and Ahmadi individuals and institutions were frequent victims of religious violence, much of which was instigated by organized religious extremists. A number of massacres in mosques and churches, including an attack on a church in Islamabad that left five persons dead, two of them foreign nationals, brought into question the Government's ability to prevent sectarian and religious violence. The Government continued the use of the "Hudood" Ordinances, which apply different standards of evidence to Muslims and non-Muslims and to men and women for alleged violations of Islamic law. The Government also kept blasphemy laws in force, which personal rivals and the authorities used to threaten, punish, or imprison Ahmadis, Christians, and orthodox Muslims.

Saudi Arabia. Freedom of religion does not exist in Saudi Arabia. The Government requires all citizens to be Muslim and prohibits all public manifestations of non-Muslim religions. Islamic practice generally is limited to that of a school of the Sunni branch of Islam as interpreted by Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, an 18th-century Arab religious reformer, and practices contrary to this interpretation are suppressed. Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face institutionalized political and economic discrimination, including restrictions on the practice of their faith, and many Shi'a sheikhs remained in detention.

The Government has stated publicly that it recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private; however, the distinction between public and private worship is not defined clearly, in effect forcing most non-Muslims to worship in a manner such as to avoid discovery. Several Christians were detained for non-Muslim worship and almost always deported after sometimes lengthy periods of arrest, during which some received lashings. The Government refused to permit clergy members to enter the country to conduct non-Muslim religious services, placing groups such as Catholics and Orthodox Christians who must have a priest on a regular basis to practice their faith at a particular disadvantage. Customs officials confiscated or censored materials considered offensive, including Bibles and religious videotapes. In certain areas, both the Mutawwa'in (religious police) and religious vigilantes harassed, assaulted, and detained citizens and foreigners.

Sudan. The Government's conduct of the 19-year civil war was largely responsible for abuses in violation of humanitarian norms: the burning and looting of villages, the starving of thousands of southerners, and the killings, rapes, and arbitrary arrests and detentions of civilians, most of whom were Christians or practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. The Government also continued the intentional bombings of civilian targets. The forced abduction of women and children and the taking of slaves by slave raiders supported by the Government in war zones continued. The victims in the villages largely were Christians or practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Some of these victims from Christian and other non-Muslim families were converted forcibly to Islam. There were reports that Islamic

NGO's in war zones withheld other services, such as medical and food aid, from the needy unless they converted to Islam. There also were reports that Christian NGO's used their services to pressure persons to convert to Christianity.

The Government's recognition of Islam as the state religion contributed to an atmosphere in which non-Muslims were treated as second-class citizens throughout the country. In government-controlled areas of the south, there continued to be credible evidence of favoritism towards Muslims and an unwritten policy of Islamization of public institutions, despite an official policy of local autonomy and federalism. Registration, obligatory for all religious groups, reportedly was very difficult to obtain, particularly for evangelical Christian groups. The Government continued to deny permission for the construction of Roman Catholic churches.

Turkmenistan. The Government continues to place restrictions on religious expression. A law on religious organizations requires that religious groups must have at least 500 members in each locality in which they wish to register in order to gain legal status with the government. The only religions that have successfully registered under the law are Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity, which are controlled by the Government. The Government severely limits the activities of nonregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. The Government's interpretation of the law severely restricts the freedom to meet and worship in private. Several members of minority faiths were deported.

Some observers have speculated that official restrictions on religious freedom, a holdover from the Soviet era, reflect the Government's concern that liberal religious policies could lead to political dissent, including in particular the introduction of Islamic extremist movements into the country. The Government appears to view participation in or sponsorship of nontraditional religions as a threat to the stability and the neutrality of the State.

Uzbekistan. The Government permits the existence of mainstream religions; however, it continued its harsh campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups it suspected of anti-State sentiments or activities. Christian churches generally are tolerated as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of a variety of Christian confessions, the Baha'i faith, and Hare Krishna, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by the law. The law, which is among the most restrictive in Central Asia, prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering religious instruction. Other prohibited activities include organizing an illegal religious group and persuading others to join such a group. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. The law prohibits groups that do not have a registered religious center from training religious personnel. In practice, these restrictions override almost all freedoms recognized by international norms. The criminal and civil codes contain stiff penalties for violating the religion law and other statutes on religious activities.

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. Despite the fact that the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to practice the religion of their choice, police often were slow to assist members of religious minorities who were victims of crimes, thereby contributing to an atmosphere of impunity. An increase in crime and violence after the October 2001 elections exacerbated this situation and increased perceptions of the vulnerability of religious minorities. The number of Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists who perceived discrimination increased.

Belarus. Head of State Alexander Lukashenko continued to pursue a policy of favoring the Russian Orthodox Church, the country's majority religion, and authorities increased harassment of other denominations and religions. The regime denied registration to some religious groups on the grounds that they were "nontraditional" and also to all religious groups considered to be "sects." Protestant denominations continued to come under attack in the government-run media. On June 27, the lower house of Parliament gave its final approval to a new law on religion that if implemented would impose further restrictions on religious freedom. The bill awaits

consideration by the upper house in the fall. Restitution of religious property seized during the Soviet and Nazi occupations remained limited.

Egypt. There was a trend toward improvement in the Government's respect for and protection of religious freedom. However, the Government continued to prosecute persons, including Muslims, for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices under the charge of "insulting heavenly religions." 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 have blocked them from utilizing permits that have been issued, and that local security officials 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. Government discrimination against non-Muslims exists in the public sector.

Georgia. The status of religious freedom deteriorated during the period covered by this report. Local police and security officials at times harassed nontraditional religious minority groups. Police failed to respond to continued attacks by Orthodox extremists, largely followers of Basil Mkalavishvili and members of the Jvari organization, against Jehovah's Witnesses and other nontraditional religious minorities. In most cases local law enforcement agents actually participated in or facilitated the attacks, which increased in frequency and violence, with impunity. On the few occasions in which investigations into such attacks have been opened, they have proceeded very slowly. No one has been convicted or sent to prison for participating in these violent attacks.

Guatemala. The Government has made little progress towards implementing the 1995 Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which provides for the respect of spiritual rights of indigenous people. The Agreement calls for Congress to pass legislation to amend the Constitution in order to "recognize, respect, and protect the distinct forms of spirituality practiced by the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinca" groups. While there is no government policy of discrimination, a lack of resources and political will to enforce existing laws and to implement the Peace Accords continued to limit the free expression of indigenous religious practice.

India. Muslims were the victims of sustained communal violence in the state of Gujarat in March and April 2002. Ostensibly sparked by communal violence directed against Hindus, the violence highlighted the continuing difficulties faced by religious minorities. On February 27, 2002, Muslim mobs attacked a train in Godhra, Gujarat, carrying Hindu activists returning from Ayodhya, the site of a 500-year-old mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992; 2 train cars were set on fire and 58 passengers were killed. In response, Hindu mobs in Gujarat and Maharashtra destroyed Muslim businesses, raped Muslim women, and killed at least 950 Muslims; the unofficial death toll was significantly higher. According to credible observers, the Gujarat fighting was aggravated by official inaction and, in some cases, involvement. The hostility against Muslims in Gujarat reflected tensions within the governing coalition, which is led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, a Hindu nationalist party with links to Hindu chauvinist groups implicated in the past to attacks against religious minorities. The growing aggressiveness of Hindu extremists also seems to be the major contributing factor to societal discrimination and occasional acts of violence against Christians by Hindus in Gujarat and elsewhere in India.

Indonesia. Religious violence and the lack of an effective government response to punish perpetrators and prevent further attacks continued to lead to allegations that officials were complicit in some of the violence or, at a minimum, allowed it to occur with impunity. The Government at times tolerated the abuse of freedom of religion, claiming that it did not have the capacity or authority to deal with the "emotions" of private individuals or groups who target others because of their beliefs. In both Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas, lax law enforcement and the limited nature of efforts to disarm Muslim fighters allowed conflicts, caused in part by religious motives, to continue despite peace agreements. Some members of military and police units were accused of siding with their coreligionists, both Muslim and Christian, and supporting combatants, either directly or indirectly. Religiously motivated violence elsewhere, mainly on the island of Java, also included threats and occasional attacks on entertainment establishments such as restaurants, bars, and nightclubs by radical Muslim groups that deemed such businesses to be immoral. The Government took no action against the perpetrators of such attacks and some observers linked the police to the radical groups.

Nigeria. The implementation of an expanded version of Shari'a (Islamic law) in several northern states challenged constitutional protections of religious freedom. In March 2002, Justice Minister Kanu Agabi made public a letter to northern governors in which he stated that sentences given under Shari'a law should not be harsher than those imposed by general secular law; however, no action resulted from this letter. Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high, and there were several violent ethno-religious conflicts, including in September 2001 in Plateau State, which resulted in the deaths of more than 2,300 persons. Many northern states continued to ban or limit public proselytizing, although it is permitted by the Constitution. In addition, in many states government officials sometimes discriminated against adherents of minority religions in hiring practices, awarding of state contracts, and granting of permits and licenses.

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.

Brunei. Despite constitutional provisions providing for the exercise of religious freedom, the Government continued to restrict the practice of non-Muslim religions. Non-Muslims were not allowed to proselytize. The Government also occasionally denied entry to foreign clergy or particular priests, bishops, or ministers, and refused permission to expand, repair, or build new churches, temples, or shrines. The Government banned the importation of religious teaching materials or scriptures. In government schools, Muslim and non-Muslim female students were required to wear Muslim attire, including a head covering.

Eritrea. In May 2002, the Government notified all religious groups that they must register or cease all religious activities. The notice further advised that applications received for registration would be reviewed by a Government committee and approved if the committee deemed them to be compatible with Eritrean culture. At the end of June 2002, a final determination on which groups would be approved had not been made, but comments from senior government officials indicated that only groups with significant historical ties to Eritrea would be licensed to operate. The Government also continued its discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Israel and the Occupied Territories. Most Israeli non-Jewish citizens, chiefly Muslims, Druze, and Christians, continued to be subject to various forms of discrimination, some of which has a strong religious dimension. Government funding to various religious sectors tended to favor Jewish citizens. Many Jewish citizens objected to the fact that, as a result of Israeli law and policy, Orthodox Jewish religious authorities have exclusive control over Jewish marriages, divorces, and burials. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews increased significantly, primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict and ongoing violence and terrorism. In the occupied territories, the violence and the Israeli Government's closure policy prevented a number of Palestinians and Israelis, including Palestinian religious leaders, from reaching their places of worship in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Jordan. The Government continued to deny the Druze and Baha'i faiths recognition as official religions but did not prohibit the practice of these faiths. Druze faced official discrimination but did not complain of social discrimination. Baha'is faced both official and social discrimination. Moreover, there reportedly were at least 39 cases of U.S. citizen children residing in Jordan against the will of their U.S. citizen mothers. According to the law, these children are considered Muslim if their fathers are Muslim, and the Muslim father of the child may restrict the child's travel.

Malaysia. Islam is the official religion, and the practice of Islamic beliefs other than Sunni Islam was restricted significantly. The Government continued to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority and periodically detained members of what it considers Islamic "deviant sects" without trial or charge. The Government generally respected non-Muslims' right of worship; however, state governments carefully controlled the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries. After the November 1999 national elections, the Government significantly expanded efforts to restrict the activities of the Islamic opposition party at mosques. Several states announced measures including banning

opposition-affiliated imams from speaking at mosques, more vigorously enforcing existing restrictions on the content of sermons, replacing mosque leaders and governing committees thought to be sympathetic to the opposition, and threatening to close down unauthorized mosques with ties to the opposition. For Muslims, particularly ethnic Malays, the right to leave the Islamic faith and adhere to another religion remained a controversial question, and in practice it was very difficult to change religions.

Moldova. The Government continued to uphold its earlier decisions to deny certain groups registration. It cited Article 15 of the Law on Religion, which prohibits registration of what it calls “schismatic movements” of a particular religion, as the basis for its decision not to recognize these groups. A number of minority religious groups in the separatist region of Transnistria continued to be denied registration and subjected to official harassment.

Russia. The Government continued to use several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience to restrict religious freedom, in particular the provision allowing the state to ban religious organizations, the re-registration requirement, the liquidation procedure, and the 15-year rule. Although the federal government generally attempted to apply the 1997 law liberally, the Government denied visas and visa renewals to a number of clergy and religious workers, especially Roman Catholics and evangelical Christians. The declaration of one of only four Roman Catholic Bishops in Russia as *persona non grata* placed serious restrictions on the ability of Russian Catholics to practice their religion. Many allegations of restrictive practices and harassment were directed at local officials and the Federal Security Service. Muslims, the largest religious minority, continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Anti-Semitic leaflets, graffiti, and articles continued to appear in some regions, such as St. Petersburg, Ryazan, and Krasnodar. Hostility toward “nontraditional” religious groups reportedly sparked occasional harassment and even physical attacks.

Turkey. Despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, the Government continued to impose some restrictions on religious groups, particularly through other constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular State. In addition, the Government maintained some restrictions for the stated reason of combating religious fundamentalism. An intense debate continued over the government ban on wearing Muslim religious dress in state facilities, including universities, schools, and workplaces. Some Muslims, Christians, and Baha’is faced government harassment for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings.

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

There continues to be a trend in Western Europe regarding discriminatory legislation or policies that stigmatize certain expressions of religious faith by wrongfully associating them with dangerous “sects” or “cults.” Other nations are adopting similar laws and policies that are based in part on those of Western Europe. In countries that lack a tradition of commitment to human rights and rule of law, such “anti-cult” laws are prone to be implemented in ways that result in the persecution of people of faith.

Belgium. Policies regarding religious “sects” in Belgium have created government-mandated agencies providing information on “harmful” organizations. The existence of these agencies strongly suggests an official judgment by the government that the groups on which it maintains data are in fact “harmful.”

France. The government continues to monitor “sects” through the Interministerial Mission in the Fight against Sects/Cults (MILS). Members of some of the 173 groups identified as cults in a 1996 parliamentary commission report have alleged instances of intolerance due to the ensuing publicity. The June 2001 “About-Picard” law tightens restrictions on organizations and lists criminal activities for which a religious association could be subject to dissolution. Leaders of the four major religions raised concerns about the legislation. There is also concern that countries with weaker protections for human rights, including some in eastern Europe and Asia, may look to the French legislation as a model for dealing with minority religions, a perception heightened by the interest shown in the French approach during travel by MILS officials to these countries.

Germany. “Sect Filters” focused on Scientology are used by some localities and private firms in hiring and/or contracting. These practices give rise to a climate of discrimination and may cause financial losses for individuals and companies.

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.

Afghanistan. The fall of the Taliban and the subsequent establishment of the interim governments resulted in a major improvement in religious freedom. The ultra-conservative, Islamic state system created by the Taliban collapsed following the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001. In its place, an interim governing body now administers a far more tolerant regime. Under the Taliban, a repressive government system based on an extremist interpretation of Islam unremittently persecuted anyone of different faiths and those who were not deemed to be sufficiently “good Muslims.” The new interim government has publicly stated a policy of religious tolerance. In the post-Taliban environment, religious minorities such as Shi’a, Hindus and Sikhs have all reported tolerance of their presence and practice. All were represented at the Loya Jirga. The Shi’a are represented in the Government by a Vice President and several Ministers. A constitutional commission will soon construct a new constitution for Afghanistan, and guarantees for religious freedom as well as the role of Islam in the state remain contentious questions for the commission and for the people of Afghanistan.

Other countries have taken positive steps in the area of religious freedom, but none have risen to the standard of “significant improvement” as stipulated in the International Religious Freedom Act. The reader may find a discussion of positive steps, where warranted, in the respective country chapters.

PART III: U.S. ACTIONS TO PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In general the best public method of promoting religious freedom is to advocate the universal principles—in particular the inviolable dignity of the human person—that are nourished when religious freedom is valued and protected. Throughout the world, our overseas diplomatic missions are our front line in promoting the right of religious freedom and opposing violations of that right. No less 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.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

This section summarizes some of the many efforts undertaken by the President and various other representatives of the U.S. Government to promote religious freedom. Most of the actions included here are indicative of the constant endeavor of the U.S. Government to engage foreign governments and peoples on the issue of religious freedom. Rarely is a single action sufficient to produce a significant change in a particular government’s repressive or discriminatory policy; yet through its steadfast promotion of religious freedom, the U.S. Government pursues the goal of universal respect for and observance of the freedom of belief.

President Bush has made it clear that he views religious freedom as a fundamental and inviolate human right, and in his discussions with foreign leaders has repeatedly emphasized the importance the United States places on protecting this fundamental freedom. In February 2002, the President gave a speech in Beijing that was broadcast nationwide, during which he declared, “Freedom of religion is not something to be feared, it’s to be welcomed.”

The Secretary of State and many senior State Department officials have addressed the issue in venues throughout the world. U.S. Government representatives raised religious freedom issues at the highest levels of government and in multilateral fora, such as the 58th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in April 2002, where the U.S. supported resolutions on Iran and religious freedom, including the mandate of the special rapporteur for religious freedom. The Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor made a strong intervention at the OSCE Implementation Meeting in September 2001, during which he urged OSCE states to respect religious freedom. The Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs reinforced U.S. defense of religious freedom with the President of Azerbaijan in January 2002.

Members of the Department of State’s Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to several countries during the period covered by this report to discuss religious freedom issues—Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Bulgaria, China and Tibet, Croatia, Georgia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mexico, Russia, Tur-

key, and Vietnam. The Director of the Office of International Religious Freedom co-headed the U.S. delegation to a United Nations conference on religious freedom and secondary school education in Madrid in November 2001.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act mandates Presidential action in cases of particularly egregious violations of religious freedom. Thus in October 2001, the Secretary of State, acting under the authority of the President, re-designated five countries—Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan—as “countries of particular concern” under the Act for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations. In addition, the Secretary designated North Korea a “country of particular concern” and again identified the Taliban regime of Afghanistan as having committed particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

This section is by no means exhaustive; rather, it is intended to provide by way of illustrative examples a portrait of U.S. actions. Further details may be found in the individual country chapters.

Afghanistan. In October 2001, the U.S. Government and international coalition forces combined with Northern Alliance forces to overthrow the Taliban regime. The U.S. and the international community worked together with Afghan opposition officials to create the Bonn Agreement in December 2001. The U.S. has worked steadily with interim governments in the months since to promote human rights and religious and ethnic tolerance, from the inclusion of minority groups in the Government and military, to assistance in the reconstruction of the country and its legal and political processes.

The Secretary of State identified the Taliban regime, which controlled most of Afghanistan until October 2001, as a “particularly severe violator” of religious freedom in 2001, for the third consecutive year.

Azerbaijan. The Ambassador repeatedly conveyed U.S. concerns about the registration process with the Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations and expressed strong concerns about Azerbaijan’s commitment to religious freedom with others in the Government and publicly in the press. Embassy officials also frequently expressed objections to media campaigns against the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and other U.S.-funded NGO’s accused of religious proselytizing. The Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs reinforced U.S. defense of religious freedom with President Heydar Aliyev in January 2002. A representative from the State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to Azerbaijan in April 2002 to convey the Department’s concerns about the reregistration process and the media campaigns against minority religions. She also met with members of Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths to hear their concerns.

Bangladesh. The Embassy encouraged the Government through the Ministry for Religious Affairs to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders, which provides course work for religious leaders on human rights, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality issues. A representative from the State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to Bangladesh in May 2002 to interview representatives of religious minorities regarding their perception that violence against them had increased during the reporting year.

Belarus. Embassy representatives had frequent contacts with leaders and members of religious groups and worked with representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to promote religious freedom. Officials of the Department of State met on a number of occasions with representatives of the Government of Belarus in Washington, D.C. to advocate respect for religious freedom and to address other human rights concerns.

Burma. The United States has discontinued bilateral aid to the Government, suspended issuance of licenses to export arms to the country, 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 (OPIC) financial services in support of U.S. investment in the country, ended active promotion of trade with the country, and halted issuance of visas to high government officials and their immediate family members. It also has banned new investment in the country by U.S. firms, opposed all assistance to the Government by international financial institutions, and urged the governments of other countries to take similar actions.

The Secretary of State identified Burma as a “country of particular concern” in 2001, for the third consecutive year.

China. The U.S. Government made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused advocacy against abuses and sup-

port for positive trends within the country. In February 2002, President Bush gave a speech at Tsinghua University in Beijing that was broadcast nationwide, during which he called upon the Government to show more religious tolerance. Embassy and Consulate officials collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within in the country's religious communities, including with bishops, priests, ministers of the official Christian churches, and Taoist, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders. U.S. Government officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The U.S. Government brought a number of Chinese religious leaders and scholars to the United States on international visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U. S. society, and sent experts on religion from the United States to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

The Secretary of State identified China as a "country of particular concern" in 2001, for the third consecutive year.

Georgia. Senior U.S. Government officials, including the Ambassador, met with President Shevardnadze and other senior government officials, such as the Parliament Speaker and the Ministers of Internal Affairs and Justice, to raise U.S. Government concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities. In April 2002, Senator Gordon Smith, a member of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, harshly criticized unpunished religious persecution in Georgia and called upon the Government to vigorously prosecute extremists who attacked nontraditional religious minorities. The Commission followed up with a letter signed by 15 Senators calling on Shevardnadze to end violence against groups of religious minorities in Georgia. A visiting representative from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom met in April 2002 with members of the Government, various religious confessions, and NGO's to underscore the need for the Government of Georgia to put an end to religious violence.

India. Reacting to the communal violence in Gujarat, the Ambassador and other senior Administration officials publicly expressed regret, extended condolences to the victims, and urged all parties to resolve their differences peacefully. In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) mission in New Delhi provided funding to assist internally displaced persons in Gujarat. Mumbai's Consul General traveled regularly to Ahmedabad, Gujarat's largest city, to meet with officials and private citizens about the causes and effects of the violence. As rioting continued, other officers from the Consulate General in Mumbai traveled to the state to assess the situation and to look into accusations of human rights abuses. 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.

Indonesia. U.S. Embassy and Consulate General officials identified and assisted several Indonesians to testify on religious freedom before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and advised the USCIRF of potential issues. The U.S. Embassy and the U.S.-Indonesian Fulbright Foundation have been helping to establish the country's first graduate-level program on comparative religion to foster competence in religious studies among educators and to increase inter-religious understanding on college and university campuses. USAID also continued its support to dozens of religiously affiliated NGO's in an effort to assist the democracy movement within the Muslim community.

Iran. From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government cosponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in Iran offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights. The United States has supported a similar resolution offered each of those years during the UN General Assembly. The U.S. Government has supported the work of the UN Special Representative on Human Rights for Iran and called on the Iranian Government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research.

The Secretary of State identified Iran as a "country of particular concern" in 2001, for the third consecutive year.

Iraq. It is the policy of the United States to encourage a change of regime in Iraq. The U.S. Government has made its position clear in public statements and in diplomatic contacts with other states. The President discussed the problems experienced by Shi'a, Christian, and other religious groups in his periodic reports to Congress on Iraq. The Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, in testimony before Congress on Iraq, highlighted the situation of persons in the south.

The Secretary of State identified Iraq as a “country of particular concern” in 2001, for the third consecutive year.

Kenya. U.S. Government officials made a concerted effort to bridge the gaps that exist between Muslims and Christians. The Ambassador hosted regular meetings with religious leaders to discuss issues affecting their communities. In April 2002, the Ambassador and senior Embassy officers traveled to Mombasa to meet with civil society, religious, and government leaders of the predominantly Muslim coast to promote a better understanding of U.S. policy and to reassure those with whom he met that the global fight against terrorism was not directed against Islam.

Laos. The Ambassador spoke directly with the President and other high officials about the state of religious freedom in Laos. Other Embassy officers raised the issue of religious freedom with a range of central and provincial officials. The Embassy supported and encouraged the January 2002 visit of the President of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE) to survey the status of religious freedom. During this visit, the IGE President traveled to the Lao Evangelical Church communities in northern Vientiane province. The visit led to the reopening of several churches in the area that had been closed by local authorities. In June 2002, at the invitation of the IGE, a delegation from the Lao Front for National Construction, the LPRP organization responsible for oversight of religious practice, traveled to the U.S. to discuss religious freedom in Laos with U.S. government officials, members of Congress, and others interested in the issue.

Mexico. U.S. Government officials encouraged the Government to continue its policy of promoting religious freedom. Embassy staff participated in the Secretariat of Government’s celebration of the International Day of Tolerance in November 2001, and met with officials in the Subsecretariat for Religious Affairs within the Secretariat of Government to discuss religious freedom. In April 2002, a representative from the Office of International Religious Freedom, accompanied by Embassy officials, met with several religious leaders and government officials in Mexico City and the state of Chiapas, including the current and past Bishops of San Cristobal de las Casas and Chiapas state authorities.

Nigeria. The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy and in statements by officials in Washington, continued to encourage a peaceful resolution to the Shari’a issue and urged that human rights and religious freedom be respected in any resolution. The Office of Transition Initiatives and the USAID also created programs for conflict resolution training. The Embassy sponsored the visit of the Executive Director of the American Muslim Council to discuss religious freedom in the United States with Muslim and Christian audiences in Abuja, Lagos, and several northern cities.

North Korea. U.S. Government policy is to encourage improvements in religious freedom. However, the United States does not have diplomatic relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and has no official presence there. U.S. policy allows U.S. citizens to travel to the country, and a number of churches and religious groups have organized efforts to alleviate suffering caused by shortages of food and medicine.

The Secretary of State designated North Korea a “country of particular concern” in 2001, the first year for the country to be placed in this category.

Russia. In May 2002, President Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, and Secretary of State Colin Powell met with religious leaders from numerous faiths in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Ambassador addressed the theme of religious freedom in talks with the Jewish community on a number of occasions, including Rosh Hashanah, as well as in remarks to members of the Muslim community at the end of Ramadan, at an event sponsored by the Council of Muftis. In addition, the Ambassador spoke of the importance of religious freedom at a Sakharov Center conference in April 2002. The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience has been the subject of numerous high-level communications between members of the executive branch of the U.S. Government and the Russian Government, involving various senior U.S. officials. In April 2002, an official of the Office of International Religious Freedom visited numerous government officials and representatives of major faiths, to whom she stressed the importance of respecting the rights of minority religions.

Sudan. The U.S. Government has made it clear to the Government that the problem of religious freedom is one of the key impediments to developing a more positive relationship between the country and the United States. The Embassy and the Department of State forcefully raised religious freedom issues publicly in press statements and at international forums, including the UN Human Rights Commission.

The Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan, John Danforth, pressed for religious freedom and met with religious leaders in his visits to Sudan. The U.S. Government supported the peace talks held under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. (In July 2002, shortly after the end of the period covered by this report, the peace talks resulted in the Machakos protocol, in which the parties agreed that legislation passed by the national government that applies to the south would not have Shari'a as a source.) The U.S. Government also led an International Eminent Persons Group to investigate slavery, abductions, and forced servitude in the country.

The Secretary of State identified Sudan as a "country of particular concern" in 2001, for the third consecutive year.

Tajikistan. Through public diplomacy, the U.S. Embassy has supported programs designed to create a better understanding of how democracies address the issue of secularism and religious freedom. Several participants in these programs reported that they came away with a better understanding of the role that religion could play in an open society. In Washington, the Office of International Religious Freedom and U.S. Government officials met to discuss religious freedom with groups of participants in U.S. Government-sponsored visitors programs, including journalists, religious figures and scholars, and government officials.

Turkey. In December 2001, the Secretary of State met with high-ranking government officials to discuss several issues, including freedom of religion. In April and May 2002, visiting representatives from the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor met with members of various religious groups to hear their concerns. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers remain in close contact with local non-governmental organizations that monitor freedom of religion. The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to re-open the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island.

Vietnam. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers frequently raised religious freedom issues with Government officials, including the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and other senior Government and Communist Party officials, explaining that progress on religious problems and human rights has an impact on the degree of full normalization of bilateral relations. U.S. Mission officials called on the Government to release Thich Quang Do from administrative probation and to allow Thich Huyen Quang to relocate to Ho Chi Minh City on humanitarian grounds. They also expressed concern for Father Nguyen Van Ly during his detention, noted the harshness of his sentence, and called for his early release. A delegation led by the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor held a Human Rights Dialog in August 2001 with the Government in which the status of Thich Quang Do, Thich Huyen Quang, the United Buddhist Church, Hmong Protestants, Protestants in the Central Highlands, Le Quang Liem, and the Catholic Church were discussed. Some religious sources have cited diplomatic intervention, primarily from the U.S., as a reason why the Government is seeking to legalize more religious groups and allow already legalized groups more freedom.