EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 2,967,909 square miles, and its population is approximately 19.8 million. According to the 2001 census, 67 percent of citizens consider themselves to be Christian, including 26 percent Roman Catholic and 20 percent Anglican. During the first census in 1911, 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. Traditional Christian denominations have seen their total number and proportion of affiliates stagnate or decrease significantly since the 1950s. Among Christians, Oriental Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) showed the largest increase in members from 1996 to 2001, 16 percent and 11 percent respectively. In 2001 approximately 15 percent of citizens considered themselves to have no religion, a 1.5 percent decrease from 1996.

At the time of the European settlement of the country, aboriginal inhabitants followed religions that were animistic in nature, involving belief in spirits behind the forces of nature and the influence of ancestral spirit beings. Aboriginal beliefs and spirituality, even among those Aborigines who identify themselves as members of a traditional organized religion, are intrinsically linked to the land generally and to certain sites of significance in particular. According to the 2001 census, 5,244 persons or less than 0.03 percent of respondents reported practicing aboriginal traditional religions. The 1996 census reported that almost 72 percent of Aborigines practiced some form of Christianity, and 16 percent listed no religion. The 2001 census contained no comparable updated data.

Recent increased immigration from Southeast Asia and the Middle East considerably expanded the numbers of citizens who identify themselves as Buddhists and Muslims. The number of Buddhists increased from 199,812 to 357,813 persons, while the number of Muslims increased from 200,885 to 281,578 persons. Between 1996 and 2001, stated affiliation with Buddhism increased by 79 percent, Hinduism by 41 percent, Islam by 40 percent, and Judaism by 5 percent.

Missionaries work in the country; however, there are no current statistics available on their number.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The State of Tasmania is the only state or territory whose constitution provides citizens with the right to profess and practice their religion. However, seven of the eight states and territories have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of a person's religion or ethno-religious background. South Australia is the only jurisdiction that does not prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. A provision of the fed-

eral Constitution precludes the adoption of a state religion. In addition, all jurisdictions, apart from South Australia, have established independent agencies to mediate allegations of religious discrimination. Minority religions are given equal rights to land, status, and the building of places of worship.

In recent years, the independent federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and a Parliamentary Committee have called upon the Government to review protections for religious freedoms and consider enacting new legislation. The law enables the HREOC to inquire into allegations of discrimination on religious grounds by the Federal Government and, if such allegations are substantiated, to make a report to Parliament.

Under the provisions of the Federal Racial Discrimination Act, the HREOC may also mediate a complaint when a plaintiff's religious affiliation is considered tantamount to membership in an ethnic group. No statistics were available on the number of complaints received during the period covered by this report. Another federal law, the Workplace Relations Act, prohibits termination of employment on the basis of religion.

In a 1998 report, the HREOC concluded that the laws did not adequately meet the country's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and recommended that the Government enact a federal religious freedoms act. In 2000 Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade inquired into religious freedom in the country and recommended, in part, that the Government respond to the HREOC's recommendation. The Government had not responded to either the HREOC's or the Committee's recommendations by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious groups are not required to register.

The Government has put in place extensive programs to promote public acceptance of diversity and multicultural pluralism, although none are focused specifically on religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The HREOC's 1998 report on religious freedom stated that "despite the legal protections that apply in different jurisdictions, many Australians suffer discrimination on the basis of religious belief or non-belief, including members of both mainstream and non-mainstream religions, and those of no religious persuasion." Many non-Christian adherents have complained to the HREOC that the dominance of traditional Christianity in civic life has the potential to marginalize large numbers of citizens. However, the complainants have not presented any concrete evidence of such marginalization. Persons who suffer discrimination on the basis of religion may resort to the court system, which is an effective method of obtaining redress. Following increased reports of threats of violence and vandalism against religious property, HREOC commenced a project in March to determine whether Muslim citizens shared an ethnic origin as well as a religion with a view to extending the coverage of the Federal Race Discrimination Act to include Muslim citizens. The project's report is expected to be published in August.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Several nongovernmental organizations promote tolerance and better understanding among religions in the country, both indigenous and non-indigenous. These groups include the Columbian Center for Christian-Muslim Relations, the National Council of Churches in Australia and its affiliated Aboriginal and Islander Commission, and the Australian Council of Christians and Jews.

During October 2002 and March 2003, reports of threats of violence and vandalism against religious properties in all state and territory capital cities increased and subsequently decreased. Government and religious leaders continued to call for tolerance towards minority groups and criticized vandalism of religious properties. In 2001, Queensland police established a special Islamic Task Force to investigate acts of anti-Muslim violence, following attacks on mosques in that state. The taskforce was disbanded following the conviction in October 2002 of a 24-year-old man for an arson attack on a mosque in the State's capital, Brisbane, in 2001. Police

forces in all states offered increased protection to religious leaders and increased patrols of religious properties.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of the promoting human rights.

Since late 2001, the U.S. Embassy in Canberra and U.S. Consulates General in Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney have conducted a nationwide outreach program aimed at promoting dialog among all faiths.

BRUNEI

The Constitution states that "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafeite sect of that religion: Provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them in any part of Brunei Darussalam;" however, the Government imposes some restrictions on non-Islamic religions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The official religion is Islam. Other religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, also are practiced; however, practitioners of non-Muslim faiths are not allowed to proselytize, and Christian-based schools are not allowed to teach the Christian religion. All schools, including eight non-government Chinese schools and four Christian-based schools, must give instruction in the Islamic faith to all students. The Government uses a range of municipal and planning legislation to restrict the expansion of all religions other than official Islam. The Government detained several Christians in late 2000 and 2001 for alleged subversive activities. These individuals subsequently were released, the last of them in October 2001 after taking an oath of allegiance to the Sultan.

The country's various religious groups coexist peacefully, but ecumenical interaction is hampered by the dominant Islamic religious ethos, which discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to explain and propagate Islam, which they term "dialog" but which are in fact one-way exchanges.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 2,227 square miles, and its resident population is approximately 360,000. The Government does not publish detailed data on religious affiliation; however, other sources indicate that 67 percent of the population are Muslim, 13 percent are Buddhist, 10 percent are Christian, and another 10 percent adhere to indigenous beliefs or other faiths. About 20 percent of the population are ethnic Chinese, of which approximately half are Christians (Anglicans, Catholics, and Methodists) and half are Buddhists. There also is a large workforce that includes Australian, British, Filipino, South Asian, Indonesian, and Malaysian expatriates that includes Muslims, Christians, and Hindus.

There are 101 mosques and prayer halls, 7 Christian churches, several Chinese temples, and 2 Hindu temples in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that, "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafeite sect of that religion: Provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them in any part of Brunei Darussalam;" however, the Government imposes some restrictions on non-Islamic religions. The official religion is Islam as practiced by the Shafeite School.

The Government describes the country as a Malay Islamic monarchy. The Government actively promotes adherence to Islamic values and traditions by its Muslim residents. The Ministry of Religious Affairs deals solely with Islam and Islamic laws, which exist alongside secular laws and apply only to Muslims.

Religious organizations other than those specifically mentioned in the Constitution are required to register with the Government, as are commercial and nonreli-

gious organizations, under the Societies Act. An organization that fails to register can face charges of unlawful assembly, and its members can be arrested and imprisoned, as well as incur financial penalties.

While Brunei has several Chinese temples, only one, in the capital, is officially registered. The other temples have not faced charges for failing to register, but they are not allowed to organize functions and celebrations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2002 the Government, using zoning laws which prohibit the use of private homes as places of worship, denied permission to two Christian religious groups to register and worship collectively.

In 1991 the Government began to reinforce the legitimacy of the hereditary monarchy and the observance of traditional and Muslim values by reasserting a national ideology known as the Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) or "Malay Islamic Monarchy," the genesis of which reportedly dates from the 15th century. In 1993 the Government participated in issuing the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, which affirms the right of all persons to a wide range of human rights, including freedom of religion. Despite this and the constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government restricts the practice of non-Muslim religions by prohibiting proselytizing of Muslims; occasionally denying entry to foreign clergy or particular priests, bishops, or ministers; banning the importation of religious teaching materials or scriptures such as the Bible; and refusing permission to expand, repair, or build new churches, temples, or shrines.

The Government sporadically expresses concern about "outsiders" preaching radical Islamic fundamentalist or unorthodox beliefs. In 1995 the Government banned the Al-Arqam movement, a radical Islamic group; it has remained banned. Citizens deemed to have been influenced by such preaching (usually students returning from overseas study) have been "shown the error of their ways" in study seminars organized by mainstream Islamic religious leaders. Moreover, the Government readily investigates and takes proscriptive action against purveyors of radical Islam or "deviationist" Islamic groups.

A 1964 fatwa issued by the State Mufti, which strongly discourages Muslims from assisting non-Muslim organizations in perpetuating their faiths, has reportedly been used by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to influence other Brunei authorities to either deny non-Muslim religious organizations permission for a range of religious and administration activities, or to fail to respond to applications from these groups. Nonetheless, in 2002 two Christian churches and their associated schools were allowed, on safety grounds, to repair, expand, and renovate buildings on their sites.

The sole official Chinese temple must obtain permission for seasonal religious events and may not organize processions outside the bounds of its half-acre site. Christian organizations are subjected to the same restrictions on processions.

Proselytizing by faiths other than the officially sanctioned branch of Islam is not permitted. There are no missionaries working in the country.

The Government routinely censors magazine articles on other faiths, blacking out or removing photographs of crucifixes and other Christian religious symbols. Government officials also guard against the distribution and sale of items that feature undesirable photographs or religious symbols.

The Government requires residents to carry an identity card that states the bearer's religion; however, the Government no longer requires visitors to identify their religion on their landing cards.

Religious authorities regularly participate in raids to confiscate alcoholic beverages and to monitor restaurants and supermarkets to ensure conformity with "halal" practices such as Islamic requirements covering the slaughter of animals and the ban on pork products. The majority of citizens generally regard these actions as a means of upholding Islam.

The Ministry of Education requires courses on Islam or the MIB in all schools. It prohibits the teaching of other religions. As of January 2002, the Islamic Education Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs was transferred to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry requires that all students, including non-Muslims, follow a course of study on the Islamic faith and learn the jawi (Arabic script). The International School of Brunei and the Jerudong International School are exempt from these restrictions. Private mission schools are not allowed to give Christian instruction and are required to give instruction about Islam; however, the Government does not prohibit or restrict parents from giving religious instruction to children in their own homes. In 2000 the Government responded to objections from parents and religious leaders and set aside tentative plans to require that more Islamic courses be taught in private, non-Islamic parochial schools.

Religious authorities encourage Muslim women to wear the tudong, a traditional head covering, and many women do so. However, some Muslim women do not and there is no official pressure on non-Muslim women to do so. In government schools, Muslim and non-Muslim female students must wear Muslim attire, including a head covering as a part of their "uniform." Muslim male students are expected to wear the songkok (hat).

In accordance with Koranic precepts, women are denied equal status with men in a number of important areas such as divorce, inheritance, and custody of children. In 2002 an amendment to the Brunei Nationality Act allowed citizenship to be transmitted through the mother, as well as through the father, of a child. Formerly it could be transmitted only through the father.

In July 1999, a new Married Women's Law came into effect, improving significantly the rights of non-Muslim married women with respect to maintenance, property, and domestic violence. A November 1999 revision of the Islamic Family Law, regarding women's position in marriage and divorce, has also strengthened the marital rights of Muslim women.

Muslims who wish to change or renounce their religion face considerable difficulties. Those born Muslim face official and societal pressure not to leave Islam. Permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs must be obtained, and there were no reports of anyone requesting such permission. There were instances during the reporting period of persons, often foreign women, who converted to Islam as a prelude to marrying Muslims (as required by Brunei Islamic Law). If the marriages took place, these women faced intense official pressure not to return to their former religions, or were faced with unduly lengthy delays in obtaining permission to do so. There are also known cases of divorced Muslim converts who, because of official and societal pressure, remain officially Muslim although they would prefer to revert to their former faiths.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In general those adhering to faiths other than Islam are allowed to practice their beliefs, provided that they exercise restraint and do not proselytize. Those non-Muslims who do proselytize have in the past been arrested or detained and sometimes held without charges for extended periods of time.

In late 2000 and early 2001, the Government used the Internal Security Act to detain at least seven Christians for allegedly subversive activities; they were not charged with a crime. Government officials maintained that the detentions were a security, not a religious, matter. The last of the detainees was released in October 2001 after taking an oath of allegiance to the Sultan. Two of the three released were Muslims who had converted to Christianity. After alleged intense official pressure during their detention, they reverted to Islam.

Agents of the Internal Security Department monitor religious services at Christian churches, and senior church members believe that they are under intermittent surveillance.

In 2000 the Government briefly detained for questioning local members of a small "deviationist" Islamic sect after the same sect in Malaysia reportedly was involved in military arms theft.

There were no new reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. While there are no reports of forced religious conversion, it is an accepted practice for the children of parents converting to Islam to be converted to Islam as well. There were reports in 2002 of teenaged children who resisted such conversion despite family and official pressure.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country's various religious groups coexist peacefully, but ecumenical interaction is hampered by the dominant Islamic religious ethos, which discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to explain and propagate Islam, which they term "dialog" but which are in fact one-way exchanges.

The country's national philosophy, the Melayu Islam Beraja concept, discourages open-mindedness to religions other than Islam, and there are no programs to promote understanding of other religions. The country's indigenous people generally convert either to Islam or Christianity but rarely to Buddhism. Consequently, Muslim officials view Christianity as the main rival to official Islam. There is no re-

ported dialog among government officials and their Christian and Buddhist counterparts.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy has increased contacts with all religious officials and continues to press the Brunei government to adhere to the spirit of its Constitution and its declarations on human rights.

BURMA

Burma has been ruled since 1962 by highly repressive, authoritarian military regimes. Since 1988, when the armed forces brutally suppressed massive pro-democracy demonstrations, a junta composed of senior military officers has ruled by decree, without a constitution or legislature. The most recent constitution, promulgated in 1974, permits both legislative and administrative restrictions on religious freedom: "the national races shall enjoy the freedom to profess their religion, provided that the enjoyment of any such freedom does not offend the laws or the public interest." Most adherents of religions that are registered with the authorities generally are allowed to worship as they choose; however, the Government has imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abused the right to freedom of religion.

There was no change in the limited respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Through its pervasive internal security apparatus, the Government generally 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 continued to experience increasing difficulties in obtaining permission to build new churches in most regions, while Muslims reported that they essentially are banned from constructing any new mosques, or expanding existing ones anywhere in the country. Anti-Muslim violence continued to occur. Restrictions on Muslim travel as well as monitoring of Muslims' activities and worship countrywide have increased in recent years.

There are social tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities, largely due to colonial and contemporary government preferences. There is widespread prejudice against Muslims.

Since 1988, a primary objective of U.S. Government policy toward the country has been to promote increased respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion. In March, the Secretary of State designated Burma a "country of particular concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Secretary of State also designated Burma a CPC in 1999, 2000, and 2001. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy promoted religious freedom during contacts with all facets of Burmese society, including officials, private citizens, scholars, representatives of other governments, international media representatives, and international business representatives, as well as leaders of Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 251,000 square miles and a population of approximately 50 million persons. The majority of the population is Theravada Buddhist, although in practice popular Burmese Buddhism includes veneration of many indigenous pre-Buddhist deities called "nats" and coexists with astrology, numerology, and fortune telling. Buddhist monks, including novices, number more than 300,000 persons, (roughly 2 percent of the male Buddhist population), and depend on the laity for their material needs, including clothing and daily donations of food. There is a much smaller number of Buddhist nuns. There are Christian minorities (mostly Baptists as well as some Catholics and Anglicans), Muslims (mostly Sunni), Hindus, and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions. According to official statistics, almost 90 percent of the population practices Buddhism, 4 percent practices Christianity, and 4 percent practices Islam; however, these statistics may underestimate the non-Buddhist proportion of the population. There is a small Jewish community in Rangoon, and while there is a synagogue,

during the period covered by this report there was neither a congregation nor a rabbi to conduct services.

The country is ethnically diverse, and there is some correlation between ethnicity and religion. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion among the majority Burman ethnic group, and among the Shan and Mon ethnic minorities of the eastern and southern regions. In much of the country there appears to be some correlation between religion and social class. Non-Buddhists tend to be better educated, more urbanized, and more business oriented than the Buddhist majority.

Christianity is the dominant religion among the Kachin ethnic group of the northern region and the Chin and Naga ethnic groups of the western region (some of whom also practice traditional indigenous religions). Christianity also is practiced widely among the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups of the southern and eastern regions, although many other Karen and Karenni are Theravada Buddhists. Hinduism is practiced chiefly by the Indian population, mostly Tamils and Bengalis, who are concentrated in major cities and in the south central region. Some Tamils, however, are Catholics. Islam is practiced widely in Arakan State, where it is the dominant religion of the Rohingya minority, as well as among some Indians and Bengalis. The Chinese ethnic minorities generally practice traditional Chinese religions. Traditional indigenous religions are practiced widely among smaller ethnic groups in the northern regions and practices drawn from those indigenous religions persist widely in popular Buddhist rituals, especially in rural areas.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The country has been ruled since 1962 by highly authoritarian military regimes. The latest military regime, now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has governed without a constitution or legislature since 1988. The most recent constitution, promulgated in 1974, permits both legislative and administrative restrictions on religious freedom: "the national races shall enjoy the freedom to profess their religion provided that the enjoyment of any such freedom does not offend the laws or the public interest." Most adherents of religions that were registered with the authorities generally have enjoyed the right to worship as they choose; however, the Government has imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abused the right to religious freedom.

Since independence in 1948, many of the ethnic minority areas have been bases for armed resistance against the Government. Although the Government has negotiated ceasefire agreements with most armed ethnic groups since 1989, active Shan, Karen, and Karenni insurgencies continued, and a Chin insurgency has developed since the late 1980s. Successive civilian and military governments have tended to view religious freedom in the context of threats to national unity.

There is no official state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to show a preference for Theravada Buddhism. Successive governments, civilian and military, have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Buddhism.

Virtually all organizations, religious or otherwise, must be registered with the Government. A government directive exempts "genuine" religious organizations from registration; however, in practice only registered organizations can buy or sell property or open bank accounts, which coerces most religious organizations to register. Religious organizations register with the Ministry of Home Affairs with the endorsement of the Ministry for Religious Affairs. The Government also provides some utility services, such as electricity, at preferential rates to recognized religious organizations.

Buddhist doctrine remained part of the state-mandated curriculum in all elementary schools. Individual children could opt out of instruction in Buddhism, and sometimes did. All students are required to recite a Buddhist prayer. Some Muslim students are allowed to leave the room, while at some schools non-Buddhists are forced to recite. The Government also funded two state universities to train Buddhist monks, and one university intended to teach non-Burmese about Burmese Theravada Buddhism.

Official public holidays include some Christian and Islamic holy days, as well as several Theravada Buddhist holy days.

The Government ostensibly promoted mutual understanding among practitioners of different religions. The Government maintained multi-religion monuments in downtown Rangoon and in other major cities. In 1998, the Government announced plans to build a new multi-religion square on some of the land that it recovered in 1997 by relocating Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim cemeteries in Rangoon's Kyandaw neighborhood. During 2001, the Government objected to the inclusion of

a cross in the design of a proposed Christian monument at the site; as a result, there was no progress on the project during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to show its preference for Theravada Buddhism and to control the organization and restrict the activities and expression of the monkhood ("sangha"), although some monks have resisted such control. Beginning in late 1990, the Government banned any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. These nine orders submit to the authority of a state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee ("Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee"—SMNC), which is elected indirectly by monks. The junta also authorized military commanders to try Buddhist monks before military tribunals for "activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism," and imposed on Buddhist monks a code of conduct. Infractions of the code are punished by criminal penalties. In November 2001, two nuns at Thayet were arrested and imprisoned for violating this order.

Since the early 1990s, the junta increasingly has made special efforts to link itself with Buddhism as a means of boosting its own legitimacy. State-controlled news media frequently depicted or described government officials paying homage to Buddhist monks; making donations at pagodas throughout the country; officiating at ceremonies to open, improve, restore or maintain pagodas; and organizing ostensibly voluntary "people's donations" of money, food, and uncompensated labor to build or refurbish Buddhist religious shrines throughout the country. State-owned newspapers routinely featured, as front-page banner slogans, quotations from the Buddhist scriptures. The Government has published books of Buddhist religious instruction. The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a government-sponsored mass organization in which participation often is not entirely voluntary, has organized courses in Buddhist culture attended by millions of persons, according to state-owned media reports.

The Government continued to fund two state Sangha Universities in Rangoon and Mandalay to train Buddhist monks under the control of the SMNC. The Government's relations with the Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools are handled chiefly by the Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana (DPPS) in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. During the mid-1990s, the Government funded the construction of the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Rangoon, which opened in December 1998. The ITBMU's stated purpose is "to share Burma's knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world." The main language of instruction is English.

The junta, which continued to operate a pervasive internal security apparatus, infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. Religious activities and organizations of all faiths also were subject to broad government restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The Government also subjected all publications, including religious publications, to control and censorship. The Government generally prohibited outdoor meetings, including religious meetings, of more than five persons. This monitoring and control undermined the free exchange of thoughts and ideas associated with religious activities. The Government continued to monitor closely the activities of members of all religions in part because religious leaders and practitioners in the past have become active politically. In 1995, the Government prohibited any political party member from being ordained. Although this measure remained in effect, it was not strictly enforced.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of minority religions, restricting the educational, proselytizing, and building activities of minority religious groups. There is a concentration of Christians among some of the ethnic minorities (such as the Karen and the Kachin) against which the army has fought for decades. However, groups that practice Buddhism (like the Shan) also have waged many of the ethnic insurgencies.

Government authorities, often in support of local Buddhist populations opposed to the spread of Christianity, continued to prohibit Christian clergy from proselytizing in some areas. For example, in early April 2002 the Government suddenly rescinded the Kachin Baptist Convention's (KBC) permission to hold its 125th anniversary celebration in Kachin State. The celebration, which reportedly attracted approximately 30,000 members later, took place in November 2002 and the KBC elected a new General Secretary. The Government initially also denied the Baptist Youth Assembly permission to hold a rally for 3,000 members in Taunggyi, Shan State, in November 2001. In May 2002, the Government allowed the group to hold the rally but attendance was restricted to only 300 members.

In general, the Government has not allowed permanent foreign religious missions to operate in the country since the mid-1960s, when it expelled nearly all foreign missionaries and nationalized all private schools and hospitals, which were extensive and were affiliated mostly with Christian religious organizations. The Government is not known to have paid any compensation in connection with these extensive confiscations. The Government has allowed a few elderly Catholic priests and nuns who worked in the country prior to independence to continue their work. At times, religious groups, including Catholics and Protestants, have brought in foreign clergy and religious workers as tourists but have been careful to ensure that their activities have not been perceived as proselytizing by the Government. Some Christian theological seminaries established before 1962 also continued to operate; however, in 2000 military authorities closed a Bible school, which had been operating in Tamu Township in Sagaing division since 1976.

Christian groups continued to experience increasing difficulties in obtaining permission to build new churches in most regions. Muslims reported that they essentially were banned from constructing any new mosques anywhere in the country and had great difficulty in obtaining permission to repair or expand existing structures. Buddhist groups are not known to have experienced similar difficulties in obtaining permission to build pagodas or monasteries. In parts of Chin State, authorities reportedly have not authorized the construction of any new churches since 1997. The Government reportedly also has denied permission for churches to be built on main roads in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. In Rangoon, authorities have instructed various Christian groups to call their worship facilities "social centers" rather than churches. One source estimated that the Government approves construction of only approximately 10 to 15 new churches per year. The Religious Affairs Ministry argued that permission to build new religious buildings "depends upon the population of the location;" however, there appeared to be no correlation between the construction of pagodas and the demand for additional places of Buddhist worship. In most regions of the country, Christian and Muslim groups that sought to build small churches or mosques on side streets or other inconspicuous locations did so with informal, rather than formal, approval from local authorities. However, obtaining informal approval from local authorities creates a tenuous legal situation. When local authorities or conditions changed, informal approvals for construction have been rescinded abruptly, and construction halted. In some cases, buildings have been torn down.

Since the 1960s, Christian and Islamic groups have had difficulties importing religious literature into the country. All publications, religious and secular, remain subject to control and censorship. Translations of the Bible into indigenous languages cannot be imported legally; however, Bibles could be printed locally in indigenous languages with government permission, but permission was often difficult to obtain. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of the confiscation of Bibles or other religious materials. In January 2002, the German-based company Good Books for All was allowed to distribute 10,000 Bibles in the country. In 1999 however, approximately 20,000 illegally imported Bibles were seized in Tamu Township in Sagaing division. During 2001, countering rumors that the Bibles were destroyed, authorities informed one religious group that the Bibles were in storage in Rangoon. At the end of the period covered by this report, the disposition of these Bibles remained unclear. One religious group reported that in 2001 it had received government permission to import 2,000 English-language Bibles, the first such import allowed in 20 years. The Bibles were not imported; however, and in May 2002 the Government reversed its earlier decision.

State censorship authorities continued to enforce restrictions on the local publication of the Bible, and Christian and Muslim publications in general. The most onerous restriction is a list of over 100 prohibited words that the censors would not allow in Christian or Islamic literature because they purportedly are indigenous language terms long used in Buddhist literature. Many of these words have been used and accepted by some of the country's Christian and Muslim groups since the colonial period. Organizations that translate and publish non-Buddhist religious texts are appealing these restrictions. They reportedly have succeeded in reducing the number of prohibited words to approximately 12, but the issue still was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. In addition, according to other reports, the censors have objected to passages of the Old Testament and the Koran that may appear to approve the use of violence against nonbelievers. Although possession of publications not approved by the censors is an offense for which persons have been arrested and prosecuted in the past, there have been no reports of arrests or prosecutions for possession of any traditional religious literature in recent years.

The Government allowed members of all religious groups to establish and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries and to travel abroad for religious

purposes, subject to restrictive passport and visa issuance practices, foreign exchange controls, and government monitoring that extends to all international activities by all citizens regardless of religion. The Government sometimes expedites its burdensome passport issuance procedures for Muslims making the Hajj.

Religious affiliation sometimes is indicated on Government-issued identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times. There appear to be no consistent criteria governing whether religion is indicated on an identification card. Citizens also are required to indicate their religion on some official application forms, such as passports, which have a separate "field" for religion, as well as ethnicity.

Non-Buddhists continued to experience employment discrimination at upper levels of the public sector. Only one non-Buddhist served in the Government at a ministerial level. The same person, a brigadier general, is the only non-Buddhist known to hold flag rank in the armed forces. The Government discouraged Muslims from entering military service, and Christian or Muslim military officers who aspired to promotion beyond middle ranks were encouraged by their superiors to convert to Buddhism.

Members of the Muslim Rohingya minority in Arakan State, on the country's western coast, continued to experience severe legal, economic, and social discrimination. The Government denies citizenship status to most Rohingyans on the grounds that their ancestors allegedly did not reside in the country at the start of British colonial rule, as required by the country's highly restrictive citizenship law. Muslim Rohingya minority returnees from Bangladesh complained of severe government restrictions on their ability to travel and to engage in economic activity. Unlike the practice for other foreign persons in the country, these Muslims are not issued a Foreign Registration Card. They are required to obtain permission from the township authorities whenever they wish to leave their village area. Authorities generally do not grant permission to Rohingya Muslims, or other native non-Muslim Arakanese, to travel to Rangoon. However, permission sometimes can be obtained through bribery. In addition, because the Government reserves secondary education for citizens only, Rohingyans do not have access to state-run schools beyond primary education, and are unable to obtain most civil service positions. Restrictions on Muslim travel and worship, in particular, reportedly continued to increase countrywide during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement, including diplomatic travel, make it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in Burma, including freedom of religion. Information about abuses often becomes available only months or years after the events.

There continued to be reports that military officers killed villagers who refused to provide porterage to the Army. For example, in December 2000, junta military officers allegedly shot and killed the local imam of a mosque in Karen State for asking the authorities to spare him from porterage, as it was the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. The military has killed religious figures on other occasions as well. In May 2002, troops killed 10 ethnic Karen, including a pastor, one day after being ambushed by fighters from a Karen resistance group.

Government security forces continued to take actions against Christian groups, arresting clergy, destroying churches, and prohibiting religious services. Evangelists in South Dagon Township near Rangoon were threatened in 2002 and 2003 with arrest if they opened their home churches and kindergartens. In Rangoon during 2001, authorities closed more than 80 house churches (a traditional gathering place for many Christians) because they did not have proper authorization to hold religious meetings. At the same time, the authorities have made it increasingly difficult to obtain approval for the construction of authorized churches. In Chin State in the western part of the country in particular, the Government attempted to coerce members of the Chin ethnic minority to convert to Buddhism and prevented Christian Chin from proselytizing by, among other things, arresting and physically abusing Christian clergy and destroying churches. Until 1990 the Chin generally practiced either Christianity or traditional indigenous religions with little interference from the Government. (The Chin were the only major ethnic minority in the country that did not support any significant armed organization in active rebellion against the Government or in an armed ceasefire with the Government. However, Chin opposition groups emerged in 1988 and subsequently developed active insurgencies against the Government.)

Authorities have attempted to prevent Chin Christians from practicing their religion. Military units repeatedly located their camps on the sites of Christian churches and graveyards, which were destroyed to build these camps; local Chin Christians

were forced to assist in these acts of desecration. In addition, there were reports of the army desecrating churches in remote areas by converting them to military bases. Since the early 1990s, security forces have torn down or forced villagers to tear down crosses that had been erected outside Chin Christian villages. These crosses often have been replaced with pagodas, sometimes built with forced labor. It also was reported that in July 2000, Captain Khin Maung Myint forcibly ordered the closure of all Christian schools in Tamu Township.

Since 1990 the Government has supported forced conversions of Christians to Buddhism. The authorities reportedly subjected Christian sermons to censorship and repeatedly prohibited Christian clergy from proselytizing. In April 2002, two Chin pastors and their families reportedly were arrested in a suburb of Rangoon for having unregistered overnight guests in their home. However, one of the pastors had filed the necessary paperwork and had not received a reply. The arrests reportedly were an effort to force them to stop proselytizing so boldly in the Dagon North area. When they refused, they were sent from Dagon North police station to Insein prison. The pastors and their families have reportedly been released from prison.

In the past, soldiers beat Christian clergy who refused to sign statements promising to stop preaching to non-Christians. Since 1990, government authorities and security forces, with assistance from monks of the Hill Regions Buddhist Missions, have sought to prevent Christian Chins from proselytizing to Chins who practice indigenous religions.

Since 1990, authorities and security forces have promoted Buddhism over Christianity among the Chin ethnic minority in diverse and often coercive ways. This campaign, reportedly accompanied by other efforts to "Burmanize" the Chin, has involved a large increase in military units stationed in Chin State and other predominately Chin areas, state-sponsored immigration of Buddhist Burman monks from other regions, and construction of Buddhist monasteries and shrines in Chin communities with few or no Buddhists, often by means of forced "donations" of money or labor. Local government officials promised monthly support payments to individuals and households who converted to Buddhism. Government soldiers stationed in Chin State reportedly were given higher rank and pay if they married Chin women and converted them to Buddhism. The authorities reportedly supplied rice to Buddhists at lower prices than to Christians, distributed extra supplies of foodstuffs to Buddhists on Sunday mornings while Christians attended church, and exempted converts to Buddhism from forced labor.

In 2001, there were credible reports that in Karen State's Pa'an township army units repeatedly conscripted as porters young men leaving Sunday worship services at some Christian churches, causing young men to avoid church attendance. Soldiers led by officers repeatedly disrupted Christian worship services and celebrations. Chin Christians were forced to "donate" labor to clean and maintain Buddhist shrines. There also were a number of credible reports that the army continued to force Chin to porter for it, both in Chin State and Sagaing division. More specifically it was reported that army units were no longer given funds for rations, and thus had to live off local villagers, using force if help was refused, although villagers reportedly were allowed to buy their way out of such work. Local government officials ordered Christian Chin to attend sermons by newly arrived Buddhist monks who disparaged Christianity. Many Christian Chin were pressured and some were forced to attend schools for monks and Buddhist monasteries and then were encouraged to convert to Buddhism. Local government officials separated the children of Chin Christians from their parents under false pretenses of giving them free secular education and allowing them to practice their own religion, while in fact the children were lodged in Buddhist monasteries where they were instructed in and converted to Buddhism without their parents' knowledge or consent. While it could not be independently verified, the Chin Human Rights Organization reported the January 2003 escape of five Chin children who had been forcibly placed in a Buddhist monastery in Matupi Township.

In 2001, according to the Chin Human Rights Organization, Lt. Colonel Biak To was fired from his military position and fined; allegedly his army and police superiors discriminated against him because of his Christian and Chin identity.

There were unconfirmed reports of governmental restrictions on the religious freedom of Christians among the Naga ethnic minority in the far northwest of the country. These reports suggested that the Government sought to coerce members of the Naga to convert to Buddhism by means similar to those used to convert members of the Chin to Buddhism. However, reports concerning the Naga, although credible, were less numerous than reports concerning the Chin. Consequently, knowledge of the status of religious freedom among the Naga is less certain. During 1999, the first mass exodus of Naga religious refugees from the country occurred; more than 1,000 Christians of the Naga ethnic group reportedly fled the country to India.

These Naga claimed that the army and Buddhist monks tried to force them to convert to Buddhism, had forced them to close churches in their villages, and then desecrated the churches. A particularly harsh military commander in the Naga area reportedly was removed from command in late 2000 and imprisoned for rape. Since 2001 until the present there were several cases where Army personnel were reportedly given incentives to marry Naga Christians and convert them to Buddhism.

There were credible reports that SPDC authorities have systematically repressed and relocated Muslims to isolate them in certain areas. For example, Muslims in Arakan State have been forced to donate time, money, and materials toward buildings for the Buddhist community. Certain townships in the Arakan State, such as Thandwe, Gwa, and Taung-gut, were declared "Muslim-free zones" by government decree in 1983. In Thandwe, there are still original-resident Muslims living there, but new Muslims are not allowed to buy plots or houses, or move in. In Gwa and Taung-gut, Muslims no longer are permitted to live in the areas, mosques have been destroyed and lands confiscated. To ensure that the mosques are not rebuilt, they have been replaced with government-owned buildings, monasteries, and Buddhist temples. In 2000 and 2001, in northern Arakan State, the Government systematically destroyed mosques in some small villages. Even in Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State, there were credible allegations of government destruction of mosques, (which typically are little more than thatch huts), which were built or expanded without permission. There were other such allegations in the Rangoon division. In recent years, there had been credible reports that Muslims in Arakan State have been compelled to build Buddhist pagodas as part of the country's forced labor program. These pagodas often have been built on confiscated Muslim land. However, there were no known reports of such activity during the period covered by this report.

In 2001 there was a sharp increase in anti-Muslim violence in the country. In February 2001, riots broke out in the town of Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State. There were various, often conflicting, accounts of how the riots began, but reports consistently stated that government security and firefighting forces did little to prevent attacks on Muslim mosques, businesses, and residences. There also were credible reports that at least some of the monks that led attacks on Muslims were military or USDA instigators dressed as monks. After 4 days of rioting, security forces moved in and prevented any additional violence. An estimated 50 Muslim homes were burned and both Muslims and Buddhists were killed and injured. Since that time, the Government has tightened already strict travel restrictions for Muslims in the area, essentially preventing any Muslims from travelling between Sittwe and other towns in the region. In 2001, seven Arakanese politicians were sentenced to 7- to 12-year prison terms for inciting the riots.

In May 2001, anti-Muslim riots broke out in the town of Taungoo in the Bago Division between Rangoon and Mandalay (an estimated 2,000 of 90,000 Taungoo inhabitants are Muslim). The riots followed the same pattern as those in Sittwe: there were varying accounts of what precipitated the fighting, security and firefighting forces did not intervene, and Muslim mosques, businesses, and residences were targeted. Again there were credible reports that the monks that appeared to be inciting at least some of the violence were Union Solidarity and Development Association or military personnel dressed as monks. After 2 days of violence the military stepped in and the violence immediately ended, but not before there was widespread destruction of Muslim homes and businesses and, reportedly, of several mosques. An estimated 10 Muslims and 2 Buddhists were killed in this incident; however, there was never any verification of this.

While there is no direct evidence linking the Government to these violent acts against Muslims, there were reports that the instigators were military or Union Solidarity and Development Association personnel. Local government authorities reportedly also alerted Muslim elders in advance of the attacks and warned them not to retaliate to avoid escalating the violence. While the specifics of how these attacks began and who carried them out may never be documented fully, it appears that the Government was, at best, very slow to protect Muslims and their property from destruction. The violence significantly heightened tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. In June 2003, there were unverified reports of incitement of anti-Muslim violence by USDA members in Irrawaddy Division.

While reported incidents of anti-Muslim violence were fewer during the period covered by this report than in the previous year, restrictions on Muslims countrywide reportedly have increased, especially since the fall of 2001. Muslims reportedly have not been allowed to build any new mosques in the country, or to replace those destroyed in the rioting of 2001. Authorities also have refused to approve requests for gatherings to celebrate traditional Muslim holidays, and have restricted the

number of Muslims that can gather in one place. Restrictions on Muslim travel reportedly have increased throughout the country.

In March 2002, six Muslims were reportedly arrested in connection with the unauthorized addition to a madrassa in Arakan State. They were released following demolition of the unauthorized construction. There was also an unverified report of the burning of Muslim homes in a village in Karen State in late April.

In 1991, tens of thousands (according to some reports as many as 300,000 persons) of members of the Muslim Rohingya minority fled from Arakan State into Bangladesh following anti-Muslim violence alleged, although not proven, to have involved government troops. Many of the 21,000 Rohingya Muslims remaining in refugee camps in Bangladesh have refused to return because they fear human rights abuses, including religious persecution. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that Burmese authorities cooperated in investigating isolated incidents of renewed abuse of repatriated citizens.

The Government continued to prevent Buddhist monks, along with all other segments of society, from calling for democracy and political dialog with pro-democracy forces. During the period covered by this report, government efforts to control these monks have included travel restrictions, arrests, pressure on Buddhist leaders to expel "undisciplined monks," and a prohibition on certain monasteries from receiving political party members as overnight guests. More than 100 monks credibly have been identified as having been imprisoned during the 1990s for supporting democracy and human rights; however, about half of these have been released, and there was no reliable estimate of the number of Buddhist clergy in prisons or labor camps at the end of the period covered by this report. Following a February 2000 letter from the Young Buddhist Monk Union advocating political actions, government authorities reportedly arrested approximately 40 monks in May or June 2001. By the end of the period covered by this report, the status of those arrested remained unknown. Monks serving sentences of life in prison reportedly included the venerable U Kalyana of Mandalay, a member of the Aung San Red Star Association, and the venerable U Kawiya of the Phayahyi monastery in Mandalay.

In July 2000, U Tay Zawata, a monk in Shan State, filed a complaint with SPDC Secretary One General Khin Nyunt and the Attorney General stating that in August 1999, government authorities in the town of Tachileik had destroyed two monasteries and dispersed over 50 monks without a proper court order and without compensation. In August 2001, at a religious ceremony in Mandalay, a Buddhist monk reportedly was arrested for delivering a sermon critical of the prevailing economic and political situation. There was no information available on whether he was later released or if he remains in prison. In 2002, the authorities expropriated a Rangoon monastery presided over by a senior Buddhist monk. This seizure led to complaints and the subsequent arrest of eight monks.

There continued to be credible reports from diverse regions of the country that government officials compelled persons, especially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or uncompensated labor to state-sponsored projects to build, renovate, or maintain Buddhist religious shrines or monuments. The Government calls these contributions "voluntary donations" and imposes them on both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. There also were reports of forced labor being used to dismantle temples and monasteries. In July 2000, army troops from the 246th Infantry Division reportedly forced 54 men to dismantle several temples and monasteries in the forced relocation areas of Kun-Hing township; in August 2000, the same troops again conscripted 87 workers from the same town and forced them to build a shelter for the lumber and tin sheets taken from the dismantled monasteries.

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, was released from house arrest in May 2002 and given freedom to travel around the country. However, on May 30, 2003, forces allied with the Government attacked her and her convoy while traveling in Sagaing Division. The Government reportedly used criminals dressed in monks' robes in the ambush.

Forced Religious Conversion

Since 1990 government authorities and security forces, with assistance from monks of the Hill Regions Buddhist Missions, have sought to coerce Chins, including children, to convert to Theravada Buddhism.

There were credible reports that hundreds of Christian tribal Nagas in the country have been converted forcibly to Buddhism by the country's military. The persons were lured with promises of government jobs to convert to Buddhism, while those who resisted were abused and kept as bonded labor by the military.

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are social tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities. Preferential treatment, both in hiring and in other areas—for non-Buddhists during British colonial rule, and for Buddhists since independence—is a key source of these tensions. There is widespread prejudice against Muslims, many of whom are ethnic Indians or Bengalis. The Government reportedly contributed to or instigated anti-Muslim violence in Arakan State in 1991, in Shan State and Rangoon in 1996, in cities throughout the country in 1997, and again in 2001.

A book entitled "In Fear of Our Race Disappearing," which first appeared in print in 1997 or 1998 by an unknown author, has contributed to anti-Muslim sentiments among Burmese Buddhists. The book describes how Muslims will displace Buddhists in the country unless actions are taken against them. Distribution of the book appeared to increase during 2001 and 2002, although it was not clear who published it. The book was cited as one factor that contributed to the rioting in early 2001 in Sittwe and Taungoo (see Section II).

Since 1994, when the pro-government Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was organized, there has been armed conflict between the DKBA and the Karen National Union (KNU). Although the DKBA reportedly includes some Christians, and there are many Buddhists in the KNU, the armed conflict between the two Karen groups has had strong religious overtones. During the mid-1990s, it reportedly was common DKBA practice to torture Christian villagers and kill them if they refused to convert to Buddhism; however, DKBA treatment of Christians reportedly improved substantially after the DKBA began to administer the regions that it had under its control.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Since 1988, a primary objective of U.S. Government policy toward the country has been to promote increased respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion. 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 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 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.

In November 2000, the U.S. Government actively supported the decision of the International Labor Organization to implement sanctions against the regime based on the Government's continued systematic use of forced labor for a wide range of civilian and military purposes.

The U.S. Embassy promotes religious freedom during contacts with all facets of Burmese society. During the period covered by this report, Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with government officials, private citizens, scholars, representatives of other governments, international media representatives, and international business representatives. 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; members of the faculties of schools of theology; and other religious-affiliated organizations and NGOs. Through public diplomacy outreach and by traveling as much as permitted, Embassy staff were able to offer moral support to local NGOs and religious leaders and to act as a conduit for information exchange with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders.

In March, the Secretary of State designated Burma as a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Secretary of State also had designated Burma a country of particular concern in 1999, 2000, and 2001.

CAMBODIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for reli-

gious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 67,000 square miles and a population of approximately 13.4 million. Approximately 93 percent of the population is Hinayana or Theravada Buddhist. The Buddhist tradition is widespread and active in all provinces, with an estimated 4,100 pagodas throughout the country. The vast majority of ethnic Cambodians are Buddhist, and there is a close association between Buddhism, Khmer cultural traditions, and daily life. Adherence to Buddhism generally is considered intrinsic to the country's ethnic and cultural identity. The remainder of the population includes approximately 700,000 Muslims, predominantly ethnic Chams, who generally are located in towns and rural fishing villages on the banks of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers and in Kampot province. There are four branches of Islam represented in the country: the Malay-influenced Shafi branch, which constitutes 90 percent of the Cham Muslims; the Saudi-Kuwaiti influenced Wahabi branch, which represents 6 percent of the population; the traditional Iman-San branch, which represents 3 percent of the population; and the Kadiani branch, which also represents 3 percent of the population. The country's small Christian community, although growing, constitutes slightly more than 1 percent of the population. More than 100 separate Christian organizations or denominations operate freely throughout the country and include more than 1,000 congregations. Other religious organizations with small followings include the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion and the Baha'i Faith, with approximately 2,000 practicing members in each group.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by the Government or private actors. Buddhism is the state religion. The Government promotes national Buddhist holidays, provides Buddhist training and education to monks and others in pagodas, and modestly supports an institute that performs research and publishes materials on Khmer culture and Buddhist traditions.

The law requires all religious groups, including Buddhists, to submit applications to the Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs in order to construct places of worship and to conduct religious activities. In their applications, groups must state clearly their religious purposes and activities, which must comply with provisions forbidding religious groups from insulting other religious groups, creating disputes, or undermining national security. There is no penalty for failing to register. Religious groups have not encountered significant difficulties in obtaining approval for construction of places of worship, but some Muslim and Christian groups report delays by some local officials in acknowledging that official permission has been granted to conduct religious meetings in homes. Such religious meetings generally take place unimpeded despite delay or inaction at the local level, and no significant constraints on religious assembly were reported during the period covered by this report.

In January the Ministry of Cults and Religions issued a Directive on Controlling External Religions. The directive requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, in addition to government approval prior to constructing new places of worship. Places of worship must be located at least two kilometers from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives from the law. The order requires that religious teachings respect other religions. There have been no reports of efforts to enforce this order.

Monks can move internally without restriction.

Government officials organize meetings for representatives of all religious groups to discuss religious developments and to address issues of concern.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Foreign missionary groups generally operated freely throughout the country and have not encountered significant difficulties in performing their work. Government officials expressed appreciation for the work of many foreign religious groups in providing much needed assistance in education, rural development, and training. How-

ever, government officials also expressed some concern that foreign groups use the guise of religion to become involved in illegal or political affairs.

The Directive on Controlling External Religions, issued by the Ministry of Cults and Religions in January, prohibits public proselytizing.

In October 2001, the Ministry of Cults and Religions issued a circular on "maintaining order in the Islamic religion in the Kingdom of Cambodia," which would have imposed new restrictions on mosques, including requiring Ministry approval for certain normal activities, particularly those that involved contact with Muslim foreigners. The Prime Minister cancelled the circular 3 days later, describing it as contrary to government policy on freedom of religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In August 2002, the Government deported two Falun Gong members listed as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees persons of concern to China. In the same month, the Government announced that it would not permit the Dalai Lama to attend an upcoming Third World Buddhism Conference in the country, and he did not attend the conference.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among the religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Constitution disallows discrimination based on religion, and minority religions experience little or no societal discrimination in practice. Adherents of the minority Muslim and Christian faiths reported few societal problems on religious issues. The Cham Muslims generally are integrated well into society, enjoy positions of prominence in business and in the Government, and face no reported persecution.

Occasional tensions have been reported among the various branches of Islam, which receive monetary support from groups in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia, or Indonesia, depending on the tenets of the particular branch. Some Buddhists also have expressed concern about the Cham Muslim community receiving financial assistance from foreign countries.

There are ecumenical and interfaith organizations, which often are supported by funding from foreign public or private groups.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives met with some religious leaders and are in contact with representatives of religious nongovernmental organizations and other groups representing the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian faiths. Embassy representatives discussed particular cases with officials from the Ministry of Cults and Religions.

CHINA

(Note: Tibetan Areas of China are discussed in a separate annex at the end of this report.)

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks 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. The Government tries to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Despite these efforts at government control, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for many unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups, including

Protestant and Catholic groups, were subjected to restrictions, which has led, in some cases, to intimidation, harassment and detention; however, the degree of restrictions varied significantly from region to region. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported increased pressure either to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA, formerly known as the central Religious Affairs Bureau) or its provincial and local offices, still known as Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB). 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. In other localities, officials worked closely with Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant groups building schools, medical facilities and retirement centers for poor communities. In the latter cases, local officials frequently encouraged Western religious groups to work in their communities to supply much-needed social services, provided that the groups did not proselytize openly. Many religious adherents reported that they are able to practice their faith in officially registered places of worship and to maintain contacts with coreligionists in other parts of the world without interference from the authorities. Official sources, religious professionals, and persons who attend services at both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the numbers of believers in the country continued to grow.

Senior government officials claim that China has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. Nonetheless, observers have witnessed some local officials prevent children from attending worship services and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering, including mosques in Xinjiang Province. Senior government officials have declined to publicly clarify China's policy toward minors and religion.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it determined to be "cults" in general and of the Falun Gong in particular. The arrest, detention and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps. There have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.

The communities of the five official religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism—coexist without significant friction; however, in some parts of the country relations between registered and unregistered Christian churches are tense.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. President Bush discussed religious freedom during his October 2002 meeting with then-President Jiang Zemin. Senior officials called on China to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and respect religious freedom. In October 2002, the Secretary of State designated China a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The country has been so designated since 1999. The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made concerted efforts to encourage religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' rights to exercise religious freedom and to seek the release of all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners. During this reporting period, some religious prisoners were released, including Tibetan nun Ngawang Sangdrol. The issue of religious freedom also was raised during the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialog in Beijing in December 2002, which was attended by both the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. Part of the U.S. delegation, led by the Assistant Secretary, traveled to Xinjiang to meet with Muslim clerics and government officials and to express concern that authorities were using the war on terrorism as a pretext to persecute Uighur Muslims. As a result of the bilateral dialog, the Chinese agreed to host a visit by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance. As of the end of the reporting period, this visit had yet to take place.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 3,705,407 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2002 Government White Paper, there are more than 200 million religious adherents, representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country has more than 100,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, more than 3,000 religious

organizations and 74 training centers for clergy. Most religious adherents profess Eastern faiths, but tens of millions adhere to Christianity or Islam. Approximately 8 percent of the population are Buddhist, approximately 1.4 percent are Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belong to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.8 percent belong to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 0.8 to 1.2 percent are registered Protestants and an estimated 2.4 percent worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control. There are no available estimates on the number of Taoists; however, according to the Taoist Association there are more than 30,000 Taoist monks and nuns and more than 1,500 Taoist temples.

Traditional folk religions (worship of local gods, heroes and ancestors) have been revived, are practiced by hundreds of millions of citizens and are tolerated to varying degrees as loose affiliates of Taoism, Buddhism or ethnic minority cultural practices.

Buddhists make up the largest body of organized religious believers. The Government estimates that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, most of whom are from the dominant Han ethnic group. However, it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because they do not have congregational memberships and often do not participate in public ceremonies. The Government reports that there are 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks.

According to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims, over 40,000 Islamic places of worship (at least half of which are in Xinjiang Autonomous Region) and more than 45,000 imams nationwide.

The unofficial, Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership far larger than the 5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church. Precise figures are impossible to determine, but Vatican officials have estimated that China has as many as 10 million Catholics in both the official and unofficial churches. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Church has 69 bishops, 5,000 clergy and over 5,600 churches and meeting houses. There are thought to be some 37 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintains that China has 15 million registered Protestants, 20,000 clergy, more than 12,000 churches and approximately 25,000 registered Protestant meeting places. Foreign and Chinese sources estimate that some 30 million persons worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control.

Estimates of the number of Falun Gong (or Wheel of the Law, also known as Falun Dafa) practitioners have varied widely; the Government claimed that prior to its harsh crackdown on the Falun Gong beginning in 1999, there may have been as many as 2.1 million adherents of Falun Gong in the country. Some experts estimated that the true number of Falun Gong adherents in the country before the crackdown was in the tens of millions. One credible source estimated that there were still 1 million Falun Gong practitioners in the country during the period covered by this report. Falun Gong blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi (a native of the country who lives in the United States). Despite the spiritual content of some of Li's teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks 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 competing possible sources of authority outside of the control of the Government.

The Criminal Law states that government officials who deprive citizens of religious freedom may, in serious cases, be sentenced to up to 2 years in prison; however, there were no known cases of persons being punished under this statute.

The State reserves to itself the right to register and thus to allow particular religious groups and spiritual movements to operate. There are five officially recognized religions: Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism. For each faith there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities. The State Council's State Administration for Religious Activities is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. The SARA and the

CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD), both of which are staffed by officials who rarely, if ever, are religious adherents, provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations on religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity.

There are six requirements for the registration of "venues for religious activity": Possession of a physical site; citizens who are religious believers and who regularly take part in religious activity; an organized governing board; a minimum number of followers; a set of operating rules; and a legal source of income. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five recognized faiths. However, when a new Protestant church approaches government authorities expressing a desire to register, it is often asked to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). This, coupled with the very small number of registered Protestant churches not affiliated with the TSPM/CCC, has led some analysts to conclude that there is a de facto requirement for Protestant religious organizations to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. Similarly, credentialing procedures often require clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. One exception is the (Russian) Orthodox Church, which is not affiliated with TSPM/CCC and operates relatively unfettered in Harbin.

China does not recognize Protestant denominations. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC's "nondenominational" teachings, which state that all Protestant beliefs are compatible. Some of these unregistered Protestant groups have expressed a willingness to register with the Government if they would be allowed not to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure and the authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have been reluctant to comply with the regulations out of principled opposition to state control of religion or due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders. Unregistered groups also frequently refuse to register on the grounds that theological compromises, lack of doctrinal freedom, and stricter control over sermons by government authorities result from registration. Unofficial groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be "cults," including the Falun Gong and the Zhong Gong movements (Zhong Gong is a qigong exercise discipline with some mystical tenets). After the revised Criminal Law came into effect in 1997, offenses related to membership in unapproved cults and religious groups were classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. Most experts attribute the subsequent sharp rise in trials for this category of crimes to the new classification.

Government sensitivity to Muslim communities varied widely. In some predominantly Muslim areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially in Xinjiang among the Uighurs, officials continued to restrict religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism. However, the Government took some steps during the period covered by this report to demonstrate respect for the country's Muslims, including by issuing statements on major Islamic holidays. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. In 2002, approximately 2,000 persons were permitted to make the Hajj with government-organized delegations, while up to an additional 2,000 privately organized Hajjis went on their own after securing government approval. Some also traveled to Mecca from third countries. According to reports, Uighur Mulsims have greater difficulty getting permission to make the Hajj than other Muslim ethnic groups, such as the Hui Muslims.

During the period covered by this report, local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship around the country, although there were no reports of the widespread razing of churches. The Government has restored or rebuilt churches, temples, mosques and monasteries damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and allowed the reopening of some seminaries, although the pace and scope of restoration activity has varied from locality to locality. Although there is far greater interest in religion and a far greater number of religious adherents today, there are far fewer temples, churches, or mosques than existed 35 years ago and many of those that exist are overcrowded and in poor condition.

The CCP Central Committee held a national religion work conference in Beijing from December 10 to 12, 2001. All senior members of the Party and senior govern-

ment officials attended, and both then President Jiang Zemin and then Premier Zhu Rongji gave speeches. Subsequently, many provinces and cities held their own work conferences on religion in 2002 and 2003 and some issued new regulations governing religious affairs. While some religious analysts believe these new regulations will make China's religious policies more transparent, others fear they will simply codify ways to persecute adherents of proscribed beliefs. In some locales, religious groups report it is easier to register places of worship than it was before the work conferences. In other areas, however, crackdowns against unsanctioned groups are linked to the new regulations. Since the 2001 national work conference, numerous scholars and religious leaders report greater freedom in discussing the role of religion in society and an open debate allowing criticism of the traditional Marxist concept of opposing religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for members of some unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. The Government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups or sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP. During the period covered by this report, 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. Several unregistered church leaders reported growing pressure by local authorities to register after the December 2001 work conference on religion. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals and members of both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all report that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow. The Government also makes demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups, for example, requiring that they publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of cults in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

Official tolerance for Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for Christianity, and these religions often face fewer restrictions. However, as these non-Western religions have grown rapidly in recent years, there were signs of greater government concern and new restrictions, especially on syncretistic groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs.

In 1995, the State Council and the CCP's Central Committee issued a circular labeling a number of religious organizations "cults" and making them illegal. Among these were the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church and the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy). Subsequent orders in later years also banned the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, the Family of Love, the Dami Mission and other groups.

In 1999, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress adopted a decision, under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, to ban all groups the Government determined to be cults, including the Falun Gong. The Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate also provided legal directives on applying the existing criminal law to the Falun Gong. The law, as applied following these actions, specifies prison terms of 3 to 7 years for "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications. Under the law, cult leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 years or more in prison.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. Thousands of individuals are still undergoing criminal, administrative, and extrajudicial punishment for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or simply refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. There have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse of Falun Gong practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs while incarcerated in prison and reeducation through labor camps.

The authorities also continued to oppose other groups considered to be "cults," such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong and Zhong Gong qigong groups, some of which reportedly had a following comparable to that of the Falun Gong.

Folk religions have been labeled as "feudal superstition" and followers sometimes are subject to harassment and repression.

The Government continued a national campaign to enforce 1994 State Council regulations and subsequent provincial regulations that require all places of religious activity to register with government religious affairs authorities. There was a great deal of variation in how local authorities handled unregistered religious groups. In certain regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, and registered and unregistered churches existed openly side-by-side and were treated similarly by the authorities. In such areas, many congregants worshipped in both types of churches. In other regions, local implementing regulations call for strict government oversight of religion, and authorities cracked down on unregistered churches and their members. For example, Zhejiang Province has restrictive religious affairs regulations stipulating that "illegal" property and income would be confiscated from those who: "1) preside over or organize religious activities at places other than those for religious activities or at places not approved by a religious affairs department; 2) do missionary work outside the premises of a place of religious activity; and, 3) sponsor religious training activities without obtaining the approval of a religious affairs department at or above the county level." Implementing regulations, provincial work reports and other government and Party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce vigorously government policy regarding unregistered churches.

In some areas, despite the rapidly growing religious population, it remained difficult to register new places of worship, even for officially recognized churches and mosques.

Due to a lack of transparent guidelines, local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. Unregistered churches are illegal, but prayer meetings and Bible study groups held in house churches are legal and generally are not subject to registration requirements so long as they remain small and unobtrusive. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the meetings as informal gatherings to, pray, sing and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are strictly proscribed. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups. Some observers cite the serious overcrowding in many registered churches as an explanation for the rapid rise in attendance at house churches and underground churches.

In the past, some local officials were said to deny registration to churches as a means to avoid regulations requiring them to give land to registered church groups. In addition to refusing to register churches, there also were reports that local officials have requested illegal "donations" from churches in their jurisdictions as a means of raising extra revenue or that they sometimes appropriate a percentage of funds raised at local churches. Christian and Taoist leaders in several parts of the country reported that local officials have been reluctant to return church property that was confiscated after the 1949 Communist revolution.

Both official and unofficial Christian churches have problems training adequate numbers of clergy to meet the needs of their growing congregations. Due to the restrictions on religion between 1955 and 1985, no priests or other clergy in the official churches were ordained during that period; most priests and pastors were trained either before 1955 or after 1985, resulting in a shortage of trained clerics between the ages of 40 and 70. Thus, as senior clerics retire, there are relatively few experienced clerics to replace them. The Government permits registered religions to train clergy and allows limited numbers of Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics and Buddhist clergy to go abroad for additional religious studies, but some religious students have had difficulty in obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. Some Catholic clerics also have complained that they were forced to bribe local officials before being allowed to enter seminaries. Due to government prohibitions, unofficial or underground churches have particularly significant problems training clergy and many clergy receive only limited and inadequate preparation.

Most religious institutions depend upon their own resources to cover operating costs. Contributions from church members are common among both Catholics and Protestants. Frequently, some religious institutions run side businesses selling reli-

gious items while others run strictly commercial businesses, such as restaurants. Sometimes the Government funds repairs for temples or shrines that have cultural or historic significance; however, there were reports that these funds were allocated only to registered churches, depending upon how cooperative with local authorities they were perceived to be.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, Party membership is required for almost all high level positions in government. State-owned businesses and organizations, and Communist Party officials restated during the period covered by this report that Party membership and religious belief are incompatible. This has a disproportionate effect in such minority-inhabited areas as Xinjiang and Tibet. The CCP reportedly has issued two circulars since 1995 ordering Party members not to adhere to religious beliefs and ordering the expulsion of Party members who belong to religious organizations, whether open or clandestine. High-ranking Communist Party officials, including then President and CCP Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, also have stated that Party members cannot be religious adherents. Muslims allegedly have been fired from government posts for praying during working hours. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) state explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities." Party and PLA military personnel have been expelled for adhering to the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

However, according to government sources, up to 25 percent of Communist Party officials in certain localities engage in some kind of religious activity. Most officials who practice a religion are Buddhist or practice a form of folk religion. Some religious figures, while not members of the CCP, are included in national and local government organizations, usually to represent their constituency on cultural and educational matters. The National People's Congress (NPC) includes several religious leaders. Two of the NPC Standing Committee's vice chairmen are Fu Tieshan, a bishop and vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, a Tibetan "living Buddha." Religious groups also are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory forum that is led by the CCP and consults with social groups outside the Party.

In 1999, the Party's Central Committee issued a document directing the authorities to tighten control over the official Catholic Church and to eliminate the underground Catholic Church if it did not bend to government control. There has been continued pressure by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association on underground Catholic bishops to join the official church, and the authorities have reorganized dioceses without consulting church leaders. The Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See and there is no Vatican representative on the mainland. The Government's refusal to allow the official Catholic Church to recognize the authority of the Papacy in many fundamental matters of faith and morals has led many Catholics to reject joining the official Catholic Church on the grounds that this denies one of the fundamental tenets of their faith. The Government insists that Catholic Patriotic Association officials, clergy and believers be "patriotic" and "law abiding." When government policy and Papal authority conflict—as they do, for example, on abortion or birth control—state policy takes precedence, leaving priests with the dilemma of how to advise their practitioners.

Most bishops of the official Catholic Church are, in fact, clandestinely recognized by the Vatican. Nonetheless, tensions between the Vatican and the Government have caused leadership problems within the official Catholic Church in the country due to the friction between some bishops who have been consecrated with secret Vatican approval (or who obtained such secret approval after their consecration) and others consecrated without such approval. While both Chinese and Vatican authorities state that they would welcome an agreement to normalize relations, disagreements concerning the role of the Pope in selecting bishops and the status of underground Catholic clerics have frustrated efforts to reach this goal.

There are large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, China's Hui Muslims who often live in Han Chinese communities throughout the country have greater religious freedom than Turkic Muslims such as the Uighurs who are concentrated in Western China. 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 to the restrictions on practicing religion placed on Party members and government officials throughout the country, in Xinjiang, teachers, professors and university students are not allowed openly to practice religion. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation, and apparent freedom to worship. After a series of violent incidents, including bombings attributed to Uighur separatists, beginning in 1997 and continuing into the period

covered by this report, police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism in Xinjiang. Because the Xinjiang government regularly fails to distinguish carefully between those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities and violent terrorism, it is often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking their political goals, or those engaged in violence.

Xinjiang provincial-level Communist Party and government officials repeatedly called for stronger management of religious affairs and for the separation of religion from administrative matters. For example, on March 6, 2002, State Councilor Ismail Amat (an ethnic Uighur) told a delegation of National People's Congress delegates that, "while enjoying the rights of religious freedom, the citizens who have religious beliefs must place the basic interests of the State and the people before everything else," and that "we must not use the freedom of religious belief as an excuse to abandon or to dodge the management of religious affairs by the State." The official Xinjiang Legal Daily newspaper reported in 2000 that a township in Bay (Baicheng) County had recently found cases of "religious interference" in judicial, marriage and family planning matters. In response, the authorities began conducting monthly political study sessions for religious personnel and the authorities began to implement more vigorously restrictions on the religious education of youths under the age of 18. During the period covered by this report, observers still reported signs on mosques in Xinjiang banning anyone under 18.

In a growing number of areas, the authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, so long as their religious observance does not involve Chinese nationals. Weekly services of the foreign Jewish community in Beijing have been held uninterrupted since 1995, and High Holy Day observances have been allowed for more than 15 years. Both reform and Orthodox Jewish services were held weekly during the period covered by this report. The Shanghai Jewish community has received permission from authorities to hold services on several occasions in an historic Shanghai synagogue, which was restored as a museum in 1998. Local authorities continue to allow the use of the synagogue on a case-by-case basis for major holidays. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) meets regularly in a number of cities, but its membership is limited strictly to the expatriate community.

The authorities permit officially sanctioned religious organizations to maintain international contacts that do not involve "foreign control." What constitutes "control" is not defined. Regulations enacted in 1994, and expanded in 2000, codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban on proselytizing. However, for the most part, the authorities allowed foreign nationals to preach to other foreigners, to bring in religious materials for personal use and to preach to Chinese citizens at churches, mosques and temples at the invitation of registered religious organizations. Foreigners legally are barred from conducting missionary activities; however, foreign Christians teaching English and other languages on college campuses openly profess their faith with minimum interference from the authorities, so long as their proselytizing remains low-key. Many Christian groups throughout the country have developed close ties with local officials, in some cases operating schools and homes for the care of the aged. In addition, Buddhist-run private schools and orphanages in the central part of the country also offer training to teenagers and young adults. However, the Hong Kong Catholic Church's contacts with its mainland counterparts in the official Catholic Church remained on hold due to restrictions imposed by the Government.

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. One printing company, a joint venture with an overseas Christian organization, has printed over 25 million Bibles since its founding in 1987, including Bibles in Braille and minority languages, such as Korean, Jingbo, Lisu, Lahu, Miao and Yao. Although Bibles can be purchased at some bookstores, they cannot be ordered directly from publishing houses by individuals. However, they were available for purchase at most officially recognized churches, at which many house church members buy their Bibles without incident. In some locations, underground churches are supplied with Bibles by registered churches. Nonetheless, some underground Christians hesitated to buy Bibles at official churches because such transactions sometimes involve receipts that identify the purchaser. Foreign experts confirm reports of chronic shortages of Bibles primarily due to limited print runs at the one government-approved publisher and logistical problems in disseminating Bibles to rural areas. The situation has improved this year, including distribution to house churches. Customs officials continued to monitor for the "smuggling" of Bibles and other religious materials into the country.

There have been credible reports that the authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

The Government teaches atheism in schools. Senior government officials claim that China has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, observers have noted some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevent children from attending worship services and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering. Senior government officials have not expressed a willingness to clarify this discrepancy. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship. Official religious organizations administer local Bible schools, 54 Catholic and Protestant seminaries, nine institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars and numerous institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy. The Government has stated that there are ten colleges conducting Islamic higher education and two other Islamic schools in Xinjiang operating with government support. Some young Muslims study outside of the country in Muslim religious schools.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny and, in some cases, repression. Although there was no significant change in the central Government's official policy toward religious freedom, the unremitting campaign against the Falun Gong and other "cults," plus frequent statements by senior leaders on the need to "strengthen religious work" (or increase supervision of religious groups by the Government), had an inevitable spillover effect.

According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, since 2000 over 100,000 practitioners have been detained without trial in reeducation-through-labor camps. On August 9, 2002, the Cambodian government, under pressure from the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia, deported back to China two Chinese Falun Gong practitioners who had been designated as refugees by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees. In 2003, the Chinese Government sentenced American citizen Falun Gong practitioner Charles Lee to 3 years in prison. Despite the fact that his imprisonment was due to illegal interference with Chinese television broadcasts, while incarcerated, he was asked to recant his beliefs and was subjected to abuse when he refused. Many other Falun Gong adherents have suffered this kind of abuse. During April to June 2003, official Chinese media accused Falun Gong adherents of "undermining anti-SARS operations." Over 180 Falun Gong adherents were detained for allegedly inciting public panic and "spreading false rumors about SARS."

Offenses related to membership in unapproved religious groups are classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the Law Yearbook of China, arrests for disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition totaled 12,826 in 2002, down significantly from previous years. Most experts agree that the spike in detentions on these charges in 1999–2000 resulted from the Government's crackdown, begun in mid-1999, on spiritual groups like the Falun Gong, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), evangelical Christian groups, localized Buddhist groups such as the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Protestant house churches and the underground Roman Catholic Church. In some areas, security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention and at times beatings and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers. Unregistered religious groups that preach beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war) or groups that have charismatic leaders often are singled out for particularly severe harassment. Some observers have attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some of these groups to under-trained clergy. Others acknowledge that some individuals may be exploiting the reemergence of interest in religion for personal gain.

Many religious leaders and adherents have been detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms. Local authorities also use an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups. 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. In July 2002, three underground Catholic priests from Baoding, Hebei province were reportedly sentenced to 3 years in a labor camp for engaging in "cult" activities. In the same month, a number of children were detained for attending an illegal catechism class in Dongan village, Fujian Province. The nun who organized the course was held for 15 days. On December

8, 2002, Gouxing "Philip" Xu was arrested in Shanghai for unlicensed preaching and sentenced to 18 months re-education-through-labor. In January 2003, the official Beijing People's Security Daily reported that police in Neixiang County, Henan Province raided three churches and detained at least 176 members of the banned "Full Scope Church." Shortly before Easter 2003, Father Zheng Ruipin of Changli, Fujian Province and 18 students at an underground Catholic seminary were detained for a month after police raided their school. In May 2003, a second priest was detained and reportedly beaten in the same town. In June 2003, 12 Christians in Funing County, Yunnan Province were detained for 15–20 days for disturbing social order when they reportedly tried to register their underground church with local officials.

Legal proceedings involving Gong Shengliang, founder of the unregistered South China Church, and several other leaders continued during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in December 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison in October 2002. Li Ying and Bang Kun Gong had their sentences reduced from death to 15 years in prison. A few hours after being released from prison, four female church members were rearrested. According to friends, Xiang Fengping, Meng Xicun, Li Yingping and Li Xianzhi were planning to press charges against prison officials who tortured them and forced them to sign false statements against Gong Shengliang. They were detained in order to prevent a lawsuit and have been sentenced to 3 years reeducation-through-labor.

In Hebei, where an estimated half of the country's Catholics reside, friction between unofficial Catholics and local authorities continued. Hebei authorities have been known to force many underground priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church or facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic detentions and, in some cases, having their children barred from school. Some Catholics have been forced into hiding. The whereabouts of underground Catholic Bishop Su Zhimin, whose followers reported that he was arrested in 1997, remained unclear, despite repeated inquiries from the international community on his status. Underground Catholic sources in Hebei claimed that he still was in detention, while the Government denied having taken "any coercive measures" against him. Reliable sources reported that Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin, as well as Father Han Dingxian in Hebei and Father Li Hongye of Henan remain under detention. A priest in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, was reportedly detained on June 16, 2003 when preparing to administer sacraments to a dying Catholic. According to several nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), a number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the period covered by this report.

Protestant church members in some parts of the country complained that central government support for local crackdowns on Fujian-based Shouters and Hubei's South China Church had created a sense of intimidation in their communities.

Some underground Catholic and Protestant leaders reported increased pressure to register their congregations after the December 2001 Central Committee Work Conference on Religion.

Police often used excessive force when detaining peaceful Falun Gong protesters. During the period covered by this report, there were credible reports that police and security force personnel abused, tortured and even killed Falun Gong practitioners while in custody. According to the Falun Gong, hundreds of its practitioners have been confined to psychiatric institutions and forced to take medications or undergo electric shock treatment against their will.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The communities of the five official religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism—coexist without significant friction. However, in some parts of the country, there is a tense relationship between registered and unregistered Christian churches. There were reports of divisions within both the official Protestant church and the house church movement over issues of doctrine; in both the registered and unregistered Protestant churches there are conservative and more liberal groups. In other areas, the two groups coexist without problems. In some provinces, including Hebei, underground and official Catholic communities sometimes have a tense relationship. In the past, Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists have complained about the presence of Christian missionaries in their communities. In gen-

eral, the majority of the population shows little interest in the affairs of the religious minority beyond visiting temples during festivals or churches on Christmas Eve or Easter. Religious/ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, experience societal discrimination not only because of their religious beliefs but also because of their status as ethnic minorities with different language and culture from the typically wealthier Han Chinese. There also has been occasional tension between the Han and the Hui, a Muslim ethnic group.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials made the case to the country's leaders that freedom of religion can strengthen, not harm, the country. In October 2002, President Bush met with then President Jiang Zemin and called for greater religious tolerance.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Christian and Catholic churches, as well as Taoist, Muslim and Buddhist leaders. U.S. officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The Department of State's nongovernmental contacts include experts on religion in China, human rights organizations and religious groups in the United States.

The Department of State has sent 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. The Embassy also brought experts on religion from the United States to the country to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

In July 2001, the Government agreed to resume the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialog, which had been suspended since 1999. A dialog took place in October 2001 and again in December 2002, when 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 Dialog in Beijing. Religious freedom was a major agenda item. After the Dialog, the U.S. delegation traveled to Urumqi, Xinjiang and met with Muslim clerics and government officials to call on Chinese authorities not to use the war on terrorism as an excuse to persecute Uighur Muslims.

In the past, government officials occasionally have refused to grant meetings to U.S. Embassy officials who intended to raise religious freedom or other human rights issues. However, after the 2002 Dialog, China extended an invitation to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit China. As of the end of the reporting period, this visit had yet to take place.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing have continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. 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 Catholic and Christian clergy and believers.

In 2002, the Secretary of State designated China a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The country has been so designated since 1999.

Tibet

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China. The Department of State follows these designations in its reporting. The preservation and development of the Tibetan people's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and the protection of their fundamental human rights continue to be of concern.

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief; however, the Government maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibet. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress those activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities that are perceived as advocating Tibetan independence or any form of separatism (which the Chinese Government describes as "splittist").

The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, rendering it difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. Restrictions on religious practice and places of worship continued during the period covered by this report, but the atmosphere for lay practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism continued to be more relaxed. The atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region, and was considerably more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made two visits to Tibet and China for discussions with Chinese officials during the period covered by this report. Additionally, five nuns were released from prison on humanitarian parole before their sentences were completed, and the number of religious practitioners detained or arrested on political grounds declined. However, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

The "patriotic education" campaign begun in the mid-1990s officially concluded, but activities to ensure the political reliability of monks and nuns continued at a lower level of intensity. Core requirements of "patriotic education," such as the renunciation of the Dalai Lama and the acceptance of Tibet as a part of China, continue to engender resentment on the part of Tibetan Buddhists. Dozens of monks and nuns continue to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic education." There were no reports of the death of religious prisoners in Tibet during the period covered by this report.

The Christian population in the TAR is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure.

The U.S. Government continued to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas by urging the central government and local authorities to respect religious freedom and preserve religious traditions. The U.S. Government protested credible reports of religious persecution and discrimination, discussed specific cases with the authorities, and requested further information about specific incidents.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Tibetan areas of China have a total land area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas is 5,354,540. Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, including many government officials and some Communist Party members who practice it quietly. Increasing numbers of non-religious Han Chinese, some Han Muslims, and some Tibetan Muslims and Christians also live in the region. While officials state that there is no Falun Gong activity in Tibet, reports indicate small numbers of practitioners among the ethnic Han population.

Chinese officials state that Tibet has 46,380 Buddhist monks and nuns and more than 1,700 monasteries, temples, and religious sites. Officials have cited almost identical figures since 1996, although the numbers of monks and nuns dropped at many sites as a result of the "patriotic education" campaign and the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of many monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified." These numbers represent only the Tibet Autonomous Region, where the number of monks and nuns is very strictly controlled; over 100,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in other Tibetan areas of China, including parts of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks 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. The Government remains suspicious of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibet. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly sup-

press those activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities that are perceived as advocating Tibetan independence or any form of separatism. The authorities also regularly require monks and nuns to make statements overtly supporting government or party policies on religion and history, to pledge themselves to support officially approved religious leaders and reincarnations, and to denounce the Dalai Lama.

The Government's longstanding harsh rhetorical campaign against the Dalai Lama and his leadership of a "government-in-exile" was muted somewhat after Beijing authorities extended invitations to the Dalai Lama envoys to visit Tibet and other areas of China. In September 2002, Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltsen, the Dalai Lama's representatives to the United States and Europe, respectively, traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, and other cities where they met with a number of government officials. These were the first formal contacts between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Government since 1993. Lodi Gyari made a second trip to China in May 2003 to meet with Chinese officials, and visited Beijing, Shanghai, and Yunnan provinces. Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, was also allowed to visit in July 2002, making his first trip to Tibet since he left in 1959. The Government asserts that it is open to dialogue and negotiation provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirms that Tibet and Taiwan are inseparable parts of China.

The Government claims that since 1976 it has contributed approximately $40 million (over 300 million RMB) toward the restoration of more than 1,400 Tibetan Buddhist sites that were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. Government funding of restoration efforts was ostensibly done to support the practice of religion, but also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibet. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this report. In June 2002, the Government began a five-year centrally funded restoration of Lhasa's Potala and Norbulingka Palaces (both former residences of the Dalai Lama) and the Sakya Monastery in rural southern Tibet (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Buddhist monasteries and pro-independence activism are closely associated in Tibet. Since 1959, the Government has moved to curb the proliferation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, claiming that they are a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government states that there are no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's democratic management committee (DMC) decides on its own how many monks the monastery can support. However, since these committees are government-controlled, the authorities are able to impose strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries. The Government has the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders, although these restrictions are not always enforced.

Although monks generally are not permitted to register and formally join a monastery prior to the age of 18, many younger boys in fact continue the tradition of entering monastic life. Young novices, who traditionally served as attendants to older monks while receiving a basic monastic education and awaiting formal ordination, continue to be admitted to some Tibetan monasteries. However, many monasteries have been unable to admit and conduct classes for trainee monks due to their inability to secure government-required approval. While underage monks have been subject to expulsion from monasteries in the past, there were no reports of such expulsions during the period covered by this report.

The Government, which does not contribute to monasteries' operational funds, continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries and retained management control through the DMCs and the local religious affairs bureaus. In many areas, regulations restrict leadership of the DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specify that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some major monasteries, government officials also sit on the committees.

Under the DMC system, funds no longer are made available to partially support monks engaged in full time religious study. Such "scholar monks" now must engage in income-generating activities, at least part of the time, and some experts are concerned that, as a result, fewer monks will be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. The erosion of the quality of religious teaching in the TAR continues to be a focus of concern. The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in Tibet is inadequate; many teachers now are in exile, older teachers are not being replaced, and those remaining in other areas of China have difficulty securing permission to travel to Tibet.

Government officials state that the "patriotic education" campaign, which began in 1996, has ended. Officials acknowledge, however, that monks and nuns continue to undergo mandatory political education or "patriotic education" on a regular basis at their religious sites. Training sessions are aimed at enforcing compliance with government regulations, and either intimidating or weeding out monks and nuns who refuse to follow Party directives and who remain sympathetic to the Dalai Lama. Monks and nuns are often required to demonstrate their patriotism by signing a declaration by which they agree to: reject independence for Tibet; reject Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the 11th reincarnation of the Panchen Lama; reject and denounce the Dalai Lama; recognize the unity of China and Tibet; and vow not to listen to the Voice of America or Radio Free Asia. In the past, non-compliant monks and nuns have been expelled from religious sites, while others chose to depart rather than denounce the Dalai Lama. Because of these efforts to control the Buddhist clergy and monasteries, anti-government sentiment remains strong.

Since the early 1990s, an average of 2,500 Tibetans have entered Nepal each year seeking refugee status to escape conditions in Tibet. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 1,268 Tibetan refugees transited through Nepal in 2002. This was roughly equivalent to the 2001 level, but was about half the level seen in the late 1990s. The decline in recent years was due in part to the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. It is difficult for Tibetans to obtain official permission to travel to India for religious purposes, and some face detention or arrest upon their return to China. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to Tibet after temporary stays. Recently the Chinese Government has tried to promote the return of exiled Tibetans to China, but the approval process is cumbersome.

After the Karmapa Lama (Urgyen Trinley Dorje), the leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kargyu school and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, secretly left for India in December 1999, the authorities increased efforts to exert control over the process for identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. While the Government approved the Karmapa Lama's selection of the seventh reincarnation of Reting Rinpoche in January 2000, a controversy remains because the Dalai Lama did not recognize the selection. Another young reincarnate lama, Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, has been denied access to his religious tutors. Authorities reportedly require that he attend a regular Chinese school. During this reporting period, foreign delegations were not granted permission to visit Pawo Rinpoche's Nenang Monastery. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltsen Norbu, the boy it selected in 1995, is the Panchen Lama's 11th reincarnation. The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government refused to recognize the Dalai Lama's choice of another boy, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, and it tightly controlled all aspects of the "official" Panchen Lama's life. Gyaltsen Norbu (who ordinarily resides in Beijing) made a highly orchestrated visit to Tibet in June and July 2002, where he met mainly with government officials. His public appearances were marked by a heavy security presence.

Government officials maintain that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama is not illegal. Currently, possession of pictures of the Dalai Lama appears to be on the rise, and many Tibetan Buddhists discreetly display them in private. However, possession of such pictures has triggered arrests in the past, and because a ban on these pictures is enforced sporadically, Tibetans are cautious about displaying them. Pictures of the Dalai Lama may not be purchased openly in Tibet. The Government also continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. The Government printed new photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, in conjunction with his 2002 visit to Tibet, but they were not publicly displayed in most places.

Some 1,000 religious figures hold positions in local people's congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. However, the Government continues to insist that Communist Party members and senior government employees adhere to the Party's code of atheism, and promotes atheism in regular political training for government cadres. Government officials confirmed that all Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers are members of the Communist Party, and that Party members are required to be atheists. However, some lower level RAB officials practice Buddhism.

The severe restrictions on lay religious practices that were imposed in early 2000 have since been relaxed, and many religious ceremonies and festivals have been conducted with increasing openness. Tibetan New Year celebrations in March 2003 were marked by a diminished security presence, large religious ceremonies, and bonfires in the streets. Lhasa's major monasteries also held large, active prayer fes-

tivals for Monlam in March 2003 and for the Saga Dawa Festival in June 2003. However, other reports indicate that government workers were restricted by authorities from participating in religious celebrations. It is also still forbidden for monasteries to convene the traditional joint Monlam celebration, and Tibetans are prohibited from actively celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6.

Travel restrictions to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report, and restrictions on issuance of passports remain in place. The Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns not previously approved by the local authorities.

Abbots and monks in predominantly Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) report that they have greater freedom to worship and conduct religious training than their coreligionists within the TAR. Diplomats have seen pictures of a number of exiled Tibetan religious figures, including the Dalai Lama, openly displayed in parts of Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu Provinces. During the reporting period, tensions continued surrounding the activities of the Serthar Tibetan Buddhist Institute (also known as Larung Gar), located in the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. Beginning in June 2001, the Government ordered thousands of monks and nuns to leave the Institute, a move observers believe was motivated by its size and the influence of its charismatic founder, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog. Residences of many monks and nuns were destroyed. At its peak, the Institute housed as many as 7,000 monks and nuns, including 1,000 Han Chinese, making it the largest concentration of monks and nuns in the country. The Government stated that it was reducing the population for sanitation and hygiene regions. Critics argued that the authorities were concerned that ethnic Han Chinese students at the Institute might become sympathetic to Tibetan issues. As recently as May 2003, conflicts over attempts to rebuild some residences resulted in arrests and in the enforced closure of the Institute to outsiders. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog returned to Larung Gar in July 2002 and officials continue to monitor activities at the Institute. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the Institute's population was approximately 4,000 monks and nuns.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it is difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice is less restrictive than in the recent past, the level of repression in Tibet remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

According to the Tibet Information Network (TIN), at least 29 monks and nuns have died while in detention in Tibet since 1987. The last such death was recorded in August 2001, when young monk Kelsang Gyatso died after a brief period of detention in Lhasa for attempting to travel to India. There were no new reports of deaths of religious prisoners during the period covered by this report.

According to statistics from the TIN, as many as 120 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns are currently detained in China, a majority of whom are imprisoned in the TAR. In May 2002, the Deputy Director of the TAR Prison Administration Bureau stated that there are approximately 110 prisoners in Tibet incarcerated for "endangering state security." The majority of these persons are monks and nuns. As in previous years, there were reports of imprisonment and abuse and torture of monks and nuns accused of political activism, and of prisoners who were beaten because they resisted political reeducation imposed by prison authorities.

Between March and October 2002, the Chinese government granted medical parole to five nuns serving long prison terms in Tibet for protest-related activity. These were the first such early releases of Tibetan political prisoners, and one of the nuns, Ngawang Sangdrol, was subsequently allowed to leave China to seek medical attention in the United States. Four other nuns—Phuntsog Nyidrol, Jangchub Drolma, Chogdrub Drolma, and Namdrol Lhamo—reportedly remain incarcerated in Lhasa's Drapchi prison and are serving long prison terms for political offenses. In 1993, Phuntsog Nyidrol and Namdrol Lhamo received extended sentences for recording Tibetan independence songs in prison, and in 1998 Jangchub Drolma and Chogdrub Drolma had their sentences extended after demonstrations at Drapchi prison. Phuntsog Nyidrol, currently the longest-serving female Tibetan political prisoner, reportedly suffers from abdominal pains, frequent vomiting, and depression. Jangchub Drolma and Chongdrub Drolma were both reportedly beaten in May 1998 for refusing to sing Chinese patriotic songs at a May Day flag raising. All four are reportedly in poor health.

The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama (when he was six years old), and his whereabouts are unknown. Government officials have claimed that the boy is under government supervision for his own protection and that he lives in Tibet and attends classes as a "normal schoolboy." All requests from the international community for access to the boy to confirm his well-being have been refused. While the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize the boy identified by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama, Tibetan monks have claimed that they were forced to sign statements pledging allegiance to the boy the Government selected. The Communist Party also urged its members to support the "official" Panchen Lama.

Chadrel Rinpoche, the lama who was accused by the Government of betraying state secrets while helping the Dalai Lama choose the incarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama, was released from prison in January 2002, according to officials. There are reports that Chadrel Rinpoche is being held under house arrest near Lhasa, but officials have not confirmed his whereabouts. They continue to state that Chadrel Rinpoche is studying scriptures in seclusion.

Following the December 1999 flight of the Karmapa Lama to India, authorities restricted access to the Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, and intensified "patriotic education" activities there. The Karmapa Lama stated that he left because of controls on his movements and the refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. As recently as August 2002, U.S. Government visitors to Tsurphu reported few monks in residence and a tense atmosphere at the monastery. The TIN also reported that no new monks are being permitted to enter the monastery.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) enjoy relatively greater freedom of worship than their coreligionists within the TAR, religious expression by Tibetan Buddhists outside the TAR has also at times resulted in detention and arrest. In fall 2002, seven lay Tibetans were detained in Kardze County, Sichuan for organizing a long-life ceremony for the Dalai Lama in February 2002. The seven were ultimately tried and given sentences of 3 to 5 year imprisonment. Further, prominent religious leader Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, arrested for his alleged connection with a series of bombings in April 2002, was given a suspended death sentence at his November trial, and his former associate, Lobsang Dhundup, was sentenced to death in the same case. In December 2002, assurances were given to senior U.S. officials that both individuals would be afforded full due process given the severity of the punishment in this case. However, Lobsang Dondrub was executed in January 2003, on the same day as his appeal, despite never having received the promised review by the Supreme People's Court. Chinese officials maintained that the sentence was applied and carried out for "sabotage of the unity of the country" and "unity of various ethnic groups" and for "crimes of terror." Several other monks were arrested or detained in connection with their support for Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche.

Since Falun Gong was banned in July 1999, there have been reports of detentions of Falun Gong practitioners in Tibet, and at least one Falun Gong adherent was reportedly detained in Tibet during the period covered by this report. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in Tibet is believed to be small.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. The Christian population in Tibet is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure, and some converts have reportedly been disinherited by their families.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas. In regular exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas. Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimina-

tion. Since January 2002, Chinese authorities have released seven ethnic Tibetan prisoners of conscience who were the subject of U.S. Government concern. U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country also regularly traveled to The TAR and other Tibetan areas to monitor conditions, including the status of religious freedom. Senior U.S. officials traveled to China several times during the period covered by this report to raise human rights concerns, including religious freedom in Tibet. U.S. officials maintain contacts with a wide spectrum of religious figures, and the U.S. Department of State's nongovernmental contacts include experts on religion in Tibetan areas and religious groups in the United States.

A round of the ongoing U.S.-China bilateral human rights dialogue was held in December 2002, and religious freedom in Tibet was an agenda item.

Hong Kong

In July 1997, Hong Kong reverted to the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of China, with a high degree of autonomy protected by the Basic Law and the Joint Declaration. The Basic Law (Hong Kong's mini-constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and Hong Kong's Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination. The Government generally respected these provisions in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion. Adherents of the spiritual movement Falun Gong were convicted in August 2002 of obstruction of a public space and minor assault for a March 2002 demonstration against the PRC government. This was the first prosecution of Falun Gong practitioners in Hong Kong.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Six of the largest religious groups long have collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up a joint conference of religious leaders.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog. Consulate General officers meet regularly with religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The HKSAR occupies 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland, and its population is approximately 6.8 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population participates in some form of religious practice. The two largest religions are Buddhism and Taoism. Approximately 4 percent of the population is Protestant, 3 percent is Roman Catholic, and 1 percent is Muslim. There also are small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong state that their practitioners number approximately 500, although HKSAR government officials report that the number is lower.

Hong Kong has 1,300 Protestant congregations representing 50 denominations. The largest Protestant denomination is the Baptist Church, followed by the Lutheran Church. Other major denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Christian and Missionary Alliance groups, the Church of Christ in China, Methodists, and Pentecostals. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is also present.

There are approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, approximately 800 Christian churches and chapels, 4 mosques, a Hindu temple, a Sikh temple, and a synagogue. The Catholic population is served by 309 priests, 60 monks, and 519 nuns, all of whom maintain traditional links to the Vatican. More than 385,996 children are enrolled in 316 Catholic schools and kindergartens. The Assistant Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' conference has his office in Hong Kong. Protestant churches run 3 colleges and more than 700 schools. Religious leaders tend to focus primarily on local spiritual, educational, social, and medical needs. Some religious leaders and communities maintain active contacts with their mainland and international counterparts. Catholic and Protestant clergy are invited to give seminars on the mainland, to teach classes there, and to develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operate in and out of Hong Kong.

A wide range of faiths is represented in the HKSAR Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians receive a Christian education.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, provides for freedom of religion, and the Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination by the HKSAR Government. The Government generally respects these provisions in practice. The HKSAR Government at all levels strives to protect religious freedom and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Although a part of the PRC since July 1, 1997, Hong Kong maintains autonomy in the area of religious freedom under the "one country, two systems" concept that defines Hong Kong's relationship to the mainland. The HKSAR Government does not recognize a state religion, and a wide range of faiths is represented in the HKSAR Government, the judiciary, and the civil service.

Religious groups are not required to register with the HKSAR Government and are exempted specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of nongovernmental organizations. Catholics in Hong Kong recognize the Pope as the head of the Catholic Church.

Religious groups wishing to purchase a site to construct a school or hospital initiate their request with the Lands Department. Church-affiliated schools make their request to the Education and Manpower Bureau. Church-affiliated hospitals do so with the Health and Welfare Bureau. For other matters, the Home Affairs Bureau functions as a liaison between religious groups and the HKSAR Government.

Representatives of 6 of the largest religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Anglican) comprise 40 members of the 800-member Election Committee, which chooses Hong Kong's Chief Executive and a number of Legislative Council members.

The HKSAR Government grants public holidays to mark special religious days on the traditional Chinese and Christian calendars, including Christmas and Buddha's birthday.

Religious groups have a long history of cooperating with the HKSAR Government on social welfare projects. For example, the HKSAR Government often funds the operating costs of schools and hospitals built by religious groups.

The spiritual movement known as Falun Gong, which does not consider itself a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance, practices freely, and is able to stage public demonstrations. In August 2002, 16 Falun Gong practitioners—including 4 from Switzerland and 1 U.S. legal permanent resident—were convicted of obstruction of public space and minor assault during demonstrations in March 2002 outside the PRC's Government Liaison Office. This was the first time that Falun Gong practitioners were convicted of an offense in Hong Kong. The case is pending appeal. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Zhong Gong (which was banned in the mainland in late 1999), Xiang Gong, and Yan Xin Qigong, also are registered and practiceD freely in Hong Kong. The Taiwan-based Guan Yin Method, a group banned by the PRC Government, is registered legally and practices freely in Hong Kong as well.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in Hong Kong.

The Basic Law calls for ties between Hong Kong religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect." This provision has not affected religious freedom in Hong Kong. In September 2002, Bishop Joseph Zen was appointed head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese. Bishop Zen has been an outspoken critic of both mainland and Hong Kong policies.

The spiritual group Falun Gong is free to practice, organize, conduct public demonstrations, or attract public attention for its movement. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the HKSAR is reported to have dropped from approximately 1,000 to approximately 500 since the crackdown on the mainland began in mid-1999, although HKSAR officials claim that the number is lower for both periods. During the period covered by the report, Falun Gong regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in the PRC, holding daily protests in the vicinity of the Hong Kong offices of the PRC Government. At least two bookstores carried Falun Gong books. Three local newspapers printed ads purchased by the group protesting the PRC Government's actions against its members. After two years during which the Falun Gong was unable to rent either government-administered or privately-owned facilities to host an annual conference, adherents obtained use of a privately-owned facility for a conference in Hong Kong in February 2003. Nearly 700 foreign and local practitioners attended. Local Falun Gong organizers

also accepted a government offer of public space for concerts and a photo exhibit in October 2002.

In August 2002, an Australian artist and Falun Gong practitioner exhibited art at a public venue. The HKSAR Government requested that the exhibit organizer not distribute the artist's catalog, which noted that the artist had been imprisoned in China for several months in 2000 for being a Falun Gong practitioner. The organizer disregarded this request and the HKSAR Government neither stopped the exhibition nor restricted distribution of the catalog. The artist was denied entry into Hong Kong to attend the exhibit. The HKSAR Government stated that the decision to deny entry was based on immigration irregularities, not on the artist's Falun Gong affiliation. The artist had previously violated Hong Kong's immigration law by exiting Hong Kong without completing the required immigration paperwork.

In February 2003, the HKSAR Government barred 80 Taiwanese Falun Gong practitioners from entering Hong Kong to attend an annual conference. Another 380 Taiwanese practitioners in the same group were admitted. One practitioner from Japan and one from Thailand were also denied entry. The HKSAR Government cited undefined "security reasons" for entry bans of the Falun Gong practitioners and denied that the actions were based on the individuals' religious beliefs or membership in any particular organization. In June 2002, over 90 foreign practitioners were also denied entry upon arrival at the Hong Kong international airport. The Falun Gong and some other international observers have alleged that they were denied entry because of pressure from Beijing.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religious communities in society contributed to religious freedom.

Two ecumenical bodies facilitate cooperative work among the Protestant churches and encourage local Christians to play an active part in society. Six of the largest religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Muslim) long have collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up the joint conference of religious leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the HKSAR Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Consulate General officers at all levels have made clear U.S. Government interests in the full protection and maintenance of freedom of religion, conscience, expression, and association. Consulate General officers meet regularly with religious leaders and community representatives.

Macau

On December 20, 1999, Macau reverted from Portuguese to Chinese administration (the handover) and became the Macau Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with a high degree of autonomy. Both the Basic Law, Macau's constitution, and the Religious Freedom Ordinance provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious practice, and the Macau Government generally respects these rights in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

Macau has a small number of Falun Gong practitioners. Police occasionally observed and questioned practitioners as they performed their exercises, according to reports from Falun Gong practitioners.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. Officers at the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong also are responsible for Macau, and meet regularly with Macau religious leaders.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Macau has a total area of 13 square miles, and a population of approximately 450,000. According to 1996 census figures, of the more than 355,000 persons surveyed, 60.9 percent had no religious affiliation, 16.8 percent were Buddhist, 13.9 percent were "other" (followers of a combination of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian beliefs), 6.7 percent were Roman Catholic, and 1.7 percent were Protestant. The number of active Falun Gong practitioners declined from approximately 100 persons to approximately 20 after the movement was banned in mainland China in July 1999. There are about 100 Muslims in Macau.

Members of the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service belong to a wide range of faiths.

Missionaries are active in Macau, and represent a wide range of faiths; the majority are Catholic.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

On December 20, 1999, Macau reverted from Portuguese to Chinese sovereignty and became the Macau Special Administrative Region of the PRC. The Basic Law, Macau's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach, and freedom to conduct and participate in religious activities. The Freedom of Religion Ordinance, which remained in effect after the handover, provides for freedom of religion, privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The Macau Government generally respects these rights in practice.

There is no state religion.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance requires religious organizations to register with Macau's Identification Services Office. There have been no reports of discrimination in the registration process.

Missionaries are free to conduct missionary activities and are active in Macau. More than 30,000 children are enrolled in Catholic schools, and a large number of influential non-Christians have received a Christian education. Religious entities may use electronic media to preach.

The Freedom of Religion Ordinance stipulates that religious groups may maintain and develop relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church in Macau recognizes the Pope as the head of the Church. A new Coadjutor Bishop for the Macau diocese was appointed by the Holy See in June.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in Macau. The Basic Law states that "The Government of Macau Special Administrative Region, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or in the efforts of religious organizations and believers in Macau to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau, or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Region."

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Falun Gong practitioners continued their daily exercises in public parks where the police occasionally observed them once or twice a month, and checked identification, according to Falun Gong practitioners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious communities are generally amicable. Citizens generally are very tolerant of other religious views and practices. Public ceremonies and dedications often include prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Macau Government in the context of its overall dialogue. Officers from the Consulate General in Hong Kong meet regularly with Macau religious leaders.

TAIWAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and the authorities' policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The American Institute in Taiwan discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Taiwan is a group of islands located in the Western Pacific Ocean off the east coast of mainland China, with a total area of approximately 13,800 square miles and a population of approximately 23 million. While the authorities do not maintain separate official statistics on religious affiliation, registration statistics suggest that of the total population, approximately 5,486,000 (23.9 percent) are Buddhist; 4,546,000 (19.8 percent) are Taoist; 845,000 (3.7 percent) follow I Kuan Tao; 605,000 (2.6 percent) are Protestant; 298,000 (1.3 percent) are Roman Catholic; 260,000 (1.1 percent) follow Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion); 200,000 (0.9 percent) follow Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion); 169,000 (0.8 percent) follow Li-ism; 150,000 (0.7 percent) follow Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion); 100,000 (0.4 percent) follow Maitreya Great Tao; 53,000 (0.2 percent) are Sunni Muslim; and 30,000 (0.1 percent) follow Tien Li Chiao (Heaven Reason Religion). In addition, approximately 16,000 persons are adherents of the Baha'i Faith; 14,000 follow Confucianism; 2,300 follow Hai Tzu Tao (Innocent Child Religion); 1,400 follow the Chinese Holy Religion; 1,000 follow the Mahikari Religion; 500 follow the Huang Chung Religion (Yellow Middle Religion); 300 follow the Maitreya Emperor Religion; and 300 follow Tai I Chiao (Great Changes Religion). Two religious groups registered during the year, Save Our Soul Religion (S.O.S. Religion) and the Church of Scientology, but they did not provide membership statistics. The non-Catholic Christian denominations include: Presbyterians, True Jesus, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There also are a small number of adherents of Judaism. More than 70 percent of the indigenous population (Aborigines) are Christian. The majority of religious adherents either are Buddhist or Taoist, but a large percentage consider themselves both Buddhist and Taoist. Approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participate in some form of organized religious practice. Almost 14 percent of the population are believed to be atheist.

In addition to practicing religion, many persons also follow a collection of beliefs that are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture that can be referred to as "traditional Chinese folk religion." These beliefs include, but are not limited to, shamanism, ancestor worship, magic, ghosts and other spirits, and aspects of animism. Such folk religion may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. There also may be an overlap between practitioners of such religions as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and practitioners of Falun Gong, whose numbers have grown rapidly in recent years to as many as 100,000. Observers have estimated that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographical lines. Members of the political leadership practice various faiths. Officials from across the political spectrum were among the thousands of persons who visited an exhibition of a sacred Buddhist relic on loan from the Chinese Buddhist Association in Beijing, which was on tour in Taiwan from February to March 2002 under the auspices of a Buddhist temple in Foguangshan, Kaosiung County. However, some pro-independence elements criticized the loan of the relic by the Beijing association as politically motivated.

Foreign missionary groups are active in Taiwan, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice. The authorities at all levels strive to protect this right in full, and do not tolerate its abuse, either by the authorities or private actors. There is no state religion.

Although registration is not mandatory, 21 religious organizations have registered with the Ministry of the Interior. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to register, and operate as the personal property of their leaders. Registered organizations operate on a tax-free basis and are required to make annual reports of their financial operations. In the past, concern over abuse of tax-free privileges or other financial misdeeds occasionally prompted the authorities to deny registration to new religions whose doctrines were not clear; however, there were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new religions during the period covered by this report. The only ramification for non-registration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for religious organizations.

Religious instruction is not permitted at the elementary, middle, or high school levels in public or private schools that have been accredited by the Ministry of Education. Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but religious instruction is not permitted in those schools; however, if they have been accredited by the Ministry of Education. If the schools are not accredited formally by the Ministry of Education, they may provide religious instruction. High schools may provide general courses in religious studies, and universities and research institutions have religious studies departments. Religious organizations operate theological seminaries.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely.

The Ministry of the Interior promotes interfaith understanding among religious groups by sponsoring symposiums, or helping to defray the expenses of privately sponsored symposiums on religious issues.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The authorities' policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious communities are generally amicable. The Taiwan Council for Religion and Peace, the China Religious Believers Association, and the Taiwan Religious Association are private organizations that promote greater understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions. These associations and various religious groups occasionally sponsor symposiums to promote mutual understanding. The Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace sponsored a summer seminar in 2002 to help college students understand the practice of major religions in Taiwan.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The American Institute in Taiwan discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The American Institute is in frequent contact with representatives of human rights organizations and occasionally meets with leaders of various religious communities.

EAST TIMOR

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government regularly expresses support to the Government for the consolidation of constitutional democracy, including respect for religious freedom and other basic human rights. With this goal in mind, the U.S. Government provided extensive support to the Justice Sector to ensure the development of judicial institutions that will promote the rule of law, and, through its implementing partners, has also provided technical advisors to the National Parliament to provide advice on, and to help draft, legislation that will strengthen democratic rule.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 5,406 square miles, and shares the island of Timor with Indonesia's bordering Nusa Tenggara Timur province. Based on the civil registration carried out from March to June 2001, the population of the territory is approximately 740,000. The overwhelming majority of the population is Catholic, and the Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities are tolerant, despite the past association of members of these groups with the occupying Indonesian military forces.

In a United Nations-administered consultation vote on August 30, 1999, an overwhelming majority of East Timorese voted against autonomy and, in effect, for independence from Indonesia. As a result, Indonesian forces began a violent withdrawal from East Timor that forced almost 200,000 people to flee across the border to West Timor. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) subsequently governed the country from October 25, 1999 until independence on May 20, 2002.

According to statistics issued by the former Indonesian administration in 1992, approximately 90 percent of the population was registered officially as Catholic, approximately 4 percent as Muslim, 3 percent as Protestant, and approximately 0.5 percent as Hindu. However, the above statistics may not be completely accurate because during the Indonesian occupation, every resident was required to register as an adherent to one of Indonesia's five recognized religions (Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism). Some observers believe that a significant percentage of those registered as Catholics are better described as animists, a category not recognized by the Indonesian Government. Also, the number of Protestants, Muslims, and Hindus has likely declined since September 1999, because these groups were disproportionately represented among supporters of integration with Indonesia. Many pro-integrationists fled to Indonesia shortly after the 1999 referendum and have not returned to East Timor. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), about 25,000 former residents remained in Indonesian West Timor at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Indonesian military forces formerly stationed in the country included a significant number of Protestants among their ranks, who played a major role in establishing Protestant churches in the territory. Fewer than half of those congregations still existed after September 1999, and many Protestants remained in West Timor at the end of the period covered by this report. The Assemblies of God is the largest and most active of the Protestant sects that continue to operate in East Timor. The country had a significant Muslim population during the Indonesian occupation, mostly made up of ethnic Malay immigrants from Indonesian islands, in addition to a small number who descended from Arabic Muslims living in the country while under Portuguese authority. The latter group was well integrated into society, but ethnic Malay Muslims often were not. Only a few hundred ethnic Malay Muslims remained in the country following the 1999 vote for independence.

A small number of Catholic and Protestant missionary groups operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Though East Timor's Constitution was ratified in March 2002 and went into effect on May 20, 2002, the Government continued to enforce Indonesian laws and UNTAET regulations that have not yet been superseded by the Constitution or East

Timorese legislation. The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship for all persons and stipulates that no one shall be persecuted or discriminated against on the basis of his or her religious convictions. The Government generally protected this right, although the newly established police force and legal system were slow to respond to allegations of criminal acts against members of minority religious groups. The Indonesian legal requirement that each citizen be a member of one of Indonesia's officially recognized religions is no longer applicable. Police cadets receive training in equal enforcement of the law and non-discrimination, including religious non-discrimination.

On April 30, Parliament passed an Immigration and Asylum Law that contains two articles concerning religion. The first requires religious associations to register with the Minister of Interior if most or all of the association's members are foreigners; registration entails submitting documents setting forth objectives, statutes or by-laws, and a membership list. The second provision provides that "foreigners cannot provide religious assistance to the Defense and Security Forces, except in cases of absolute need and urgency." Although the President vetoed the law after the Court of Appeals deemed certain provisions unconstitutional, the Court found neither of the provisions concerning religion to be unconstitutional. Therefore, they will presumably take effect when Parliament re-enacts the law, expected in the fall of 2003.

During the drafting of the Constitution, many members of the public expressed their desire to declare Roman Catholicism as the official religion. Ultimately, the drafters provided for separation of church and state in the Constitution; however, Catholicism remains the dominant religion. Most designated public holidays are Catholic holy days, including Good Friday, Assumption Day, All Saint's Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas Day.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's policy and practice have contributed to the generally unrestricted practice of religion; however, incidents of violence against certain religious groups have occurred in the past, and there were reports of attacks on one such group during the year (see Section III).

The strong and pervasive influence of the Catholic Church may sometimes affect the decisions of government officials. However, representatives of Protestant churches and the Islamic community also have some political influence and hold high positions in the Executive Branch of Government and in the National Parliament.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution in the country and its priests and bishops are accorded the highest respect in local society. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities generally are friendly, despite the past association of these groups with the occupying Indonesian forces.

Some Muslim groups at times have been victims of harassment. The Dili mosque remains inhabited by approximately 250–300 ethnic Malay Muslim migrants, who initially fled during the violence of September 1999. These migrants returned to East Timor in the 3 months after the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) took control but expressed fear of returning to their homes. They claim that they may face hostility if required to re-enter the community at large. Their occupation of the Dili mosque has created tensions with Muslims of Arabic descent, some of whom want the Government to remove the ethnic Malay Muslims from the mosque. However, the Arabic Muslim community has been reluctant to seek the necessary court order required for eviction. There is no evidence that religion is at the core of the dispute; rather, most observers believe that it stems more from disagreements about property rights and the disputed citizenship claims of long-time ethnic Malay residents.

On December 4, 2002, a student demonstration in front of the National Parliament in Dili degenerated into violence. Two rioters were killed and 15 seriously injured. A mosque sustained damages during the unrest, for which Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo apologized to the Muslim community. Of the 80 participants arrested, none were specifically linked to the attack on the mosque, although the charges in many cases were broad enough to cover involvement in the mosque attack.

In April an East Timorese Muslim family, who had been living in West Timor and wished to return to their home in Liquica, reported that at a "reconciliation meeting" in their village, the District Administrator told them that Muslims were not welcome in the community. However, the family did return to their village and they have not experienced harassment.

At times Protestants also have endured harassment. During the period covered by this report, there were no further attacks on Protestant churches such as those that occurred in June 2000 in Aileu district. However, allegations of harassment surfaced, including violent attacks, against a Brazilian Protestant evangelist in the Liquica area and against local residents whom he had converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. In May a woman claimed that three members of her family, two of whom were police officers, threatened her and struck her after having accused her of humiliating the family by her conversion. The woman did not make a formal complaint to police and the alleged crime was never prosecuted. In June another Liquica man claimed that three men, including a local teacher, threatened him with violence because of his decision to convert. The prosecutors to whom he complained told the parties to settle the case outside of the formal justice system, as is common in cases not involving major violence. Later in June, a preliminary court hearing was held involving an alleged attack on the Brazilian minister himself. There were no further developments in the case by the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government regularly expresses support to the leaders of the Government for consolidation of constitutional democracy, including respect for basic human rights such as religious freedom. Additionally, the U.S. Government maintained a steady dialog with members of Parliament during their deliberations on legislation affecting religious freedom. The U.S. Government provides extensive support to the justice sector to encourage the development of judicial institutions that will promote the rule of law and ensure respect for religious freedom as guaranteed in the Constitution.

FIJI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. In February 2001, the Court of Appeals found that the Constitution remains in force, despite its purported abrogation by insurgent forces in mid-2000.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country consists of more than 300 islands, 100 of which are inhabited; most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. The country's total area is approximately 6,800 square miles, and its population is 825,000. 52 percent of the population is Christian, 33 percent Hindu, and 7 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination is the Methodist Church, which claims 219,000 members. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also have significant followings. The Methodist Church is supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remains influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural areas. There also are a small number of non-denominational Christian sects.

During the period covered by this report, some persons shifted their membership from the Methodist Church to other Christian denominations and Islam. Some Methodist Church members from rural areas reportedly found it difficult, due to deteriorating economic circumstances, to contribute the tithes expected of them; others reportedly changed affiliations because they did not support the nationalist political agenda associated with the Methodist Church.

Religion runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constitute approximately 54 percent of the population, follow Christianity; most Indo-Fijians,

who constitute approximately 40 percent of the population, practice Hinduism or Islam. However, a significant minority of Indo-Fijians are Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese and European persons. Approximately 60 percent of the Chinese community practice Christianity and 40 percent practice Confucianism or some form of ancestor worship. The European community is predominantly Christian.

The Hindu faith is predominant within the Indo-Fijian community, while the Muslim (Sunni) minority makes up approximately 20 percent of the Indo-Fijian community. Both the Hindu and Muslim communities have a number of active religious and cultural organizations. The Fiji Muslim League is also actively pursuing the conversion of indigenous Fijians from Christianity to Islam and has attained some success in this initiative.

There are numerous Christian missionary organizations that are nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations, notably the Methodist Church, have missionaries in the country; they operate numerous religious schools, including colleges, which are not subsidized by the Government.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the present Government generally respects this right in practice and does not tolerate its abuse. Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. There is no state religion, although elements of the Methodist Church have advocated the establishment of a Christian state. Religious groups are not required to register. The Government does not restrict foreign clergy and missionary activity, or other typical activities of religious organizations.

Major observances of all three major religions are celebrated as national holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Diwali, and Mohammed's birthday. The Government partly sponsors an annual ecumenical prayer festival.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the role of religion continues to be a political issue. Some Methodist Church authorities and allied political groups continued to advocate the establishment of a Christian state, but the new leadership of the Methodist Church moderated somewhat the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous leadership. A letter of support from the then head of the Methodist Church, Reverend Tomasi Kanilagi, to George Speight, the leader of the May 19, 2000, armed takeover of Parliament, was made public in the press in June 2001. In the letter, Reverend Kanilagi publicly expressed his intention to use the Methodist Church as a forum under which to unite all ethnic Fijian political parties for the elections scheduled for August 2001. The meetings held for this purpose were not subjected to the same stringent permit restrictions as other political gatherings. Those parties dominated by Indo-Fijians do not support the establishment of a Christian state and insist that church and state should remain separate.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In May unidentified persons burglarized a mosque in the western part of the country. As of the end of the period covered by this report, no arrests had been made; however, the burglary was viewed as an isolated incident and widely condemned. In addition, there were two incidents of vandalism or burglary directed against Hindu places of worship in May and June 2001, and a Catholic church was desecrated in August 2001. The Hindu religious group Sanatan indicated that it believes the attacks against its places of worship also were isolated incidents and not indicative of greater intolerance. The perpetrators of these acts of vandalism never were identified.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy has disseminated public diplomacy materials related to political and religious freedom across a wide spectrum of society. The Embassy continued to make religious freedom an important part of its effort to promote democracy and human rights.

INDONESIA

The Constitution provides for "all persons the right to worship according to his or her own religion or belief," and states that "the nation is based upon belief in one supreme God," and the Government generally respects these provisions; however, there are some restrictions on certain types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions. The Government gives official recognition in the form of representation at the Ministry of Religious Affairs to five major faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. While only these five religions are officially recognized, the law does not forbid other religions.

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

After brokering peace accords signed by Christian and Muslim community leaders in the provinces of Maluku, North Maluku and Central Sulawesi, the Government deployed large numbers of troops and police in key conflict areas and encouraged Java-based Islamic extremists to depart. Interreligious violence decreased in all three provinces; the death toll in the Malukus fell by two-thirds. Peaceful conditions prompted many displaced persons to return to their homes, particularly in Central Sulawesi, and the Government and several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) facilitated these returns. Nevertheless, there were localized incidents of interreligious violence in these provinces. At least 55 persons were killed and at least 291,000 persons remained displaced during the period covered by this report.

The Government made progress in promoting religious freedom by cracking down on terrorists and other extremists who carried out attacks in the name of religion. After members of Jemaah Islamiyah ("Islamic Community" or JI), a terrorist organization committed to the goal of creating an Islamic super-state in Southeast Asia, bombed two nightclubs in Bali on October 12, 2002, killing 202 people, the Government aggressively tracked down and arrested at least 32 individuals. JI members confessed to dozens of terrorist attacks in previous years, including the Christmas Eve 2000 bombings of churches across the country that killed 19 persons. The Government charged the group's leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir with treason, and his trial began in Jakarta in April. The trial was ongoing as of the end of the reporting period. Police arrested and prosecuted at least 18 suspects that were members of Laskar Jundullah ("Army of God"), a militia that in earlier years carried out attacks against Christians in Maluku and Central Sulawesi. The Islamic militia Laskar Jihad, which had killed large numbers of Malukan Christians, officially disbanded in October 2002.

There were, however, some setbacks for respect for religious freedom during this reporting period. The Government failed to hold accountable many religious extremists who had committed crimes inspired by religious intolerance. The Government did not prosecute Laskar Jihad members who had killed and terrorized Christians in the Malukus and Central Sulawesi, and allowed them to return to their homes, mostly in Java, without legal recriminations. The Government arrested Laskar Jihad's chief, Jafar Umar Thalib, and charged him with inciting religious violence and two other relatively minor offenses. On January 30, a Jakarta court acquitted him, prompting accusations of high-level intervention.

In Aceh Province, the Government began the operational implementation of Islamic law, or Shari'a, on March 3 by issuing a presidential decree establishing Shari'a courts. Some citizens worried that implementation of Shari'a would provide new powers to already-discredited law enforcement institutions 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. On May 19, the Government imposed full martial law on Aceh as part of a military operation to crush the separatist movement. As of the

end of the reporting period, the impact of that measure on the continued implementation of Shari'a was unclear.

Islamic hardliners sometimes criticized, threatened, or attacked other Muslims who held a more moderate view of the faith.

Religious extremists, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), again physically attacked a number of nightclubs, bars, and billiard clubs in the name of religion, claiming that the establishments were immoral. There were strong indications that many of these attacks were linked to extortion and kickback schemes, rather than to religious motives. The most high-profile attacks occurred in Jakarta on October 5, 2002. The Government responded by charging the FPI's leader, Habib Rizieq, with inciting violence. Rizieq's trial began in Jakarta on May 8 and was ongoing as of the end of the reporting period.

Certain political parties advocated amending the Constitution to adopt Shari'a on a nationwide basis, but Parliamentarians voted down this proposal, and the country's largest Muslim social organizations remained opposed to the idea.

In the easternmost province of Papua, NGOs reported that Laskar Jihad fighters were present in considerable numbers early in this reporting period. However, by June, six months after the group disbanded, there was no compelling evidence that any such individuals remained in the province.

Some notable advances in interreligious tolerance and cooperation occurred during this reporting period. For example, at Christmastime 2002, with fears running high over a repeat of the Christmas 2000 violence, many Muslims joined ranks with their Christian compatriots to protect churches across the country. In the first half of 2003, many Muslims and Christians in Maluku and Central Sulawesi worked together to repair mosques and churches.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Government actively engaged with religious leaders and with the Government, and facilitated a number of interfaith conferences and seminars. These activities involved scholars and university students, and emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in a pluralistic society.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands covering a total area of approximately 1.8 million square miles (approximately 0.7 million miles are landmass), and its population is approximately 230 million. Approximately half of the population resides on the island of Java.

There are no reliable, up-to-date statistics on the religious affiliation of citizens. The latest data available, from 1990, indicated that 87 percent of the population were Muslim, 6 percent were Protestant, 3.6 percent were Catholic, 1.8 percent were Hindu, 1 percent were Buddhist, and 0.6 percent were "other," which includes traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Judaism. However, the country's religious composition is a politically charged issue, and some Christians, Hindus and members of other minority faiths believe that the 1990 statistics grossly undercounted the true numbers of non-Muslims. Confucians note that when the Government compiled the statistics in 1990, restrictions existed on the practice of their faith. An official census carried out in 1976–77 showed that 0.7 percent of the population professed Confucianism, but the current number of Confucians in the country is not known. The law requires adult citizens to carry a national ID card (KTP), and this card lists the citizen's religious affiliation. During this reporting period, some non-Muslims, such as animists, found it difficult or impossible to obtain a KTP that accurately reflected their faith, and consequently, many were identified incorrectly as Muslims. There is no information available on the number of atheists, but their numbers are believed to be small.

Muslims are the majority population in most regions of Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, and North Maluku. Muslims are distinct minorities only in Papua, Bali, East Nusa Tenggara, and parts of North Sumatra and North Sulawesi. Most Muslims are Sunni, although there are adherents of other branches of Islam, including the Shi'a, who number approximately 100,000 nationwide; Sufi; and Amadhiyah. The Government maintained an official ban on the activities of the Amadhiyah. The mainstream Muslim community may be divided into two groups: "modernists" who closely adhere to scriptural orthodox theology while embracing modern learning and modern concepts; and predominantly Javanese "traditionalists," often followers of charismatic religious scholars and organized around Islamic boarding schools. The leading national "modernist" social organization is Muhammadiyah, which was founded in 1912 and has approximately 30 million followers and branches throughout the country. The group establishes mosques,

prayer houses, clinics, orphanages, poorhouses, schools and public libraries, and runs universities. The largest "traditionalist" social organization is the 40-million-strong Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which is concentrated in Java and was founded in 1926, partly in reaction to Muhammadiyah. NU focuses on many of the same activities. The two organizations frequently issue joint statements that promote religious tolerance and challenge the religious authority of extremists.

There also are small numbers of messianic Islamic groups, including the Malaysian-affiliated Darul Arqam, whose support base grew during this reporting period, and the Indonesian Jamaah Salamulla (or Salamulla Congregation), a syncretist sect that remained numerically small. Followers of Amadhiyah, whose group expanded during this reporting period, claim that their leader Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was an Indian Muslim prophet and that anyone can become a prophet. The Amadhiyahs have 242 branches spread throughout much of the country; there are 8 Amadhiyah mosques in Jakarta. Another messianic group, Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), which hopes to turn the country into an Islamic state, lost support during the reporting period when evidence came to light that suggested the group had encouraged a member to commit robbery. Another such group is the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute (LDII), founded in East Java in the 1940s (see Section II, Abuses of Religious Freedom).

A high percentage of the country's Christians reside in the eastern part of the country. Roman Catholicism accounts for a significant percentage of the population in much of East Nusa Tenggara Province. Catholics are also concentrated in southeast Maluku Province. Protestantism is predominant in the central part of Maluku, North Maluku, and North Sulawesi. In Papua Protestants predominate in the north, and Catholics in the south—the result of a Dutch colonial policy, continued by the Indonesian Government after independence, of dividing the territory between foreign Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Other significant Christian populations are located in North Sumatra, the seat of the Batak Protestant Church. There also are significant Christian populations in West Kalimantan (mostly Catholic), Central Kalimantan (mostly Protestant), and Java, particularly in major cities. Many urban ethnic Chinese citizens adhere to Christian faiths or combine Christianity with Buddhism or Confucianism. Smaller Christian groups include the Jehovah's Witnesses, who claim an active membership of approximately 17,100, not including children.

Over the past 3 decades, internal migration, both government-sponsored and spontaneous, has altered the demography of the country. In particular it has increased the percentage of Muslims in the predominantly Christian eastern part of the country. By the early 1990s, Christians became a minority for the first time in some areas of the Malukus. While government-sponsored transmigration of citizens from heavily populated Java and Madura to more sparsely populated areas of the country contributed to the increase in the Muslim population in the areas of resettlement, there is no evidence to suggest that creating a Muslim majority in Christian areas was the objective of this policy, and most Muslim migration was spontaneous. Regardless of its intent, the economic and political consequences of the transmigration policy contributed to religious conflicts in the Malukus and Sulawesi, and to a lesser extent, in Papua.

Many of the country's Hindus live in Bali, where they account for over 90 percent of the population. However, the Hindu association Parishada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) notes that there are major concentrations of Hindus in Central Java, East Java and Lampung Provinces. PHDI reported that 18 million Hindus lived in Indonesia, a figure that far exceeds Government estimates. Balinese Hinduism has developed various local characteristics that distinguish it from Hinduism as practiced on the Indian subcontinent. There also are Hindu minorities (called "Keharingan") in Central and East Kalimantan, the city of Medan (North Sumatra), South and Central Sulawesi, and Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara). Some of these Hindus left Bali for these areas as part of the Government's transmigration program. Hindu groups such as Hare Krishna and followers of the Indian spiritual leader Sai Baba also are present in the country, though in small numbers. In addition there are some indigenous faiths, including the "Naurus" on Seram Island (Maluku Province), which incorporate Hindu beliefs. The Naurus combine Hindu and animist beliefs, and many also have adopted some Protestant principles.

Among the country's Buddhists, an estimated 70 percent practice the Mahayana school. Theravada followers account for another 20 percent, with the remaining adherents belonging to the Tantrayana, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Nichiren, and Maitreya schools. According to the Indonesian Youth Buddhist Council (MBI), 60 percent of the country's Buddhists are ethnic Chinese. The MBI was part of the Indonesian Great Sangha Conference (KASI). Another and somewhat older Buddhist organization active nationally is the Indonesian Buddhist Council (WALUBI), which has affiliates from all of the schools. Relations between the WALUBI and the KASI

were strained during the period covered by this report, with KASI members feeling that the Government had unfairly thrown its support behind WALUBI.

The number of adherents of Confucianism in the country is unclear. The national census, carried out every 5 years, no longer enables respondents to identify themselves as Confucian. But in 1976–1977, the last year in which the category was included, 0.7 percent of the population was self-identified as Confucian, according to the Supreme Council for Confucian Religion in Indonesia (MATAKIN). Since that census the proportion of practicing Confucians probably has increased slightly because the Government's lifting of restrictions on Confucianism has made it easier to practice the faith. The MATAKIN estimates that 95 percent of the country's Confucians are ethnic Chinese, with the balance being mostly indigenous Javanese. The majority of Confucians are located on Java, Bangka Island, North Sumatra, North Sulawesi, West and Central Kalimantan, and North Maluku. Many Confucians also practice Buddhism and Christianity. Before the ban on Confucianism was lifted in 2000, many Confucian temples were located inside Buddhist temples.

Animism and other types of traditional belief systems, generically termed "Aliran Kepercayaan," still are practiced by sizeable populations in Java, Kalimantan, and Papua. Many of those who practice Kepercayaan describe it as more of a meditation-based spiritual path than a religion. Many animists combine their beliefs with one of the Government-recognized religions.

There are several dozen Jews in Surabaya, East Java, where the nation's only synagogue (Orthodox, Sephardi) is located. There also is a small Jewish community in Jakarta.

The Baha'i community said it had thousands of members in the country, but an exact figure could not be ascertained.

Falun Gong has between 2,000 and 3,000 followers in the country, and its members said the number of followers grew slightly during this reporting period. Yogyakarta is home to more than 1,000 practitioners, according to representatives of the faith. They added that some of the group's activities are mildly hampered by the Government in response to external pressure.

There are no data available on the religious affiliations of foreign nationals and immigrants.

At least 350 foreign, primarily Christian, missionaries operate in the country. Many work in Papua, Kalimantan and other areas where there are large numbers of animists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for "all persons the right to worship according to his or her own religion or belief," and states that "the nation is based upon belief in one supreme God" and the Government generally respects these provisions; however, there are some restrictions on certain types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs extends official status to only five faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Religious organizations other than the five recognized faiths are able to register with the Government, but only with the State Ministry for Culture and Tourism, and only as social organizations. This results in restrictions on certain types of religious activities and on religions with fewer domestic followers. In recent years, the Government had taken steps to normalize the status of Confucians and Jehovah's Witnesses, but it failed to accord them and members of other less-represented faiths equal treatment in such areas as civil registration. Religions that are not permitted to register are precluded from renting venues to hold services. Any religion that cannot register is forced to find alternative means to practice their faith.

The Government permits the practice of the indigenous belief system of Kepercayaan, but only as a cultural manifestation, and not as a religion; followers of "Aliran Kepercayaan" must register with the Ministry of Education's Department of National Education. Some religious minorities whose activities had been banned in the past, such as those of the Rosicrucians, were allowed to operate openly. Other minority faiths such as Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, and Taoism legally also are permitted.

Although Islam is the religion of the vast majority of the population, the country is not an Islamic state. Over the past 50 years, many fundamentalist Islamic groups sporadically have sought to establish an Islamic state, but the country's mainstream Muslim community, including influential social organizations such as the Muhammadiyah and the NU, continued to reject the idea. Proponents of an Islamic state argued unsuccessfully in 1945 and throughout the parliamentary democracy

period of the 1950s for the inclusion of language (the "Jakarta Charter") in the Constitution's preamble, making it obligatory for Muslims to follow Shari'a. During the Suharto regime, the Government prohibited all advocacy of an Islamic state. With the loosening of restrictions on freedom of speech and religion that followed the fall of Suharto in May 1998, proponents of the "Jakarta Charter" resumed their advocacy efforts, and this was the case prior to the August 2002 Annual Session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), a body that has the power to change the Constitution. The secular political parties and appointed police, military, and functional representatives, who together held a majority of seats in the MPR, rejected in committee meetings proposals to amend the Constitution to include Shari'a, and the measure never came to a formal vote. However, the MPR did approve changes to the Constitution that mandated that the government increase "faith and piety" in education. This decision, widely seen as a compromise measure to satisfy Islamist parties, set the scene for a controversial education bill that was passed in June.

Shari'a was a source of intense debate and concern during this reporting period, and many of the issues raised in this debate touched on religious freedom. In Aceh the Government authorized the implementation of Shari'a as part of a special autonomy package designed to quell a long-running separatist rebellion. Law 18/2001, which granted Aceh special autonomy, included authorization to implement Shari'a in the province as long as it did not violate national law. To comply, the law required the incorporation of Shari'a precepts into the legal code through passage of local regulations by the provincial legislature. Neither Law 18/2001 nor the two local regulations passed so far have settled such complicated questions as whether the Supreme Court can review decisions of Shari'a courts or whether Shari'a would apply to non-Muslims in Aceh or to Acehnese outside the province.

The implementation of Shari'a had not been a demand of either the armed Acehnese separatist movement or civil society. There was no consensus in Acehnese society about the meaning or jurisdiction of Shari'a. Some worried about giving discredited law enforcement institutions new powers to intrude on private religious matters, such as whether an individual sells food or cigarettes during the fasting month of Ramadan. Some supporters of Shari'a saw its implementation as a mechanism for creating a more effective justice system in Aceh.

The provincial legislature approved two local regulations related to Shari'a during this reporting period. Local regulation No. 10/2002 granted authority to Shari'a courts "to examine, decide, and resolve cases related to family, civil, and criminal law." This effectively superseded the authority of the pre-existing religious courts, which had been responsible for hearing civil cases relating to family law and involving Muslims. On March 3, the Central Government issued Presidential Decree 11/2003, which formally established Shari'a courts by simply renaming the religious courts, while retaining their infrastructure, jurisdiction, and staff. But the judges of these new Shari'a courts resisted this expansion of their jurisdiction, citing a lack of expertise. They said they would continue to hear only cases related to the "performance of Islamic duties in daily life," the subject of the second local regulation approved by the legislature.

Local regulation No. 11/2002 requires the preservation of Islamic culture, the observance of Islamic holidays and the wearing of "Islamic dress" by Muslims. Many of these provisions are part of Acehnese social norms and were already widely observed. For example, a majority of women in Aceh already wear some sort of head covering when in public. There was no evidence that the authorities had punished any Muslims—or non-Muslims—for dress-code violations during the period covered by this report. However, religious freedom advocates viewed enactment of this regulation with concern.

Religious leaders responsible for the drafting of the Shari'a local regulations insisted that there were no plans to institute the stricter aspects of Islamic law found in the "hudud," such as amputation or stoning. On May 19, the Government imposed full martial law on Aceh as part of a military operation to crush the separatist movement. At the end of this reporting period, the impact of that measure on the continued implementation of Shari'a was still unclear.

Women's groups took an active role in the process of drafting local regulations in order to avoid provisions that might restrict women's rights. Debate among women on the interpretation of Shari'a increased during this reporting period, with a number of books published and at least two conferences held.

The Government requires that official religions comply with a number of Ministry of Religious Affairs and other ministerial directives in their registration and activities. Among these are the Regulation on Building Houses of Worship (Joint-Ministerial Decree No. 1/1969); the Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion (Ministerial Decision No. 70/1978); Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (Ministerial Decision No. 20/1978); and Proselytizing Guidelines (No. 77/1978).

Conversions between faiths did occur, as allowed by law, but remained a source of controversy. Comprehensive statistics were not available, but Catholic officials stated that approximately 10,000 Muslims convert to Catholicism each year. Some Christians who converted to Islam did so in order to marry a Muslim. Many of the Muslims who converted to Christianity appeared to do so in response to either evangelization or exposure to humanitarian or social activities organized by church groups. Some Muslims accused Christian missionaries of using food and micro-credit programs to lure poor Muslims to the faith. Some of those who converted felt compelled not to publicize the event for family-related and social reasons.

Religious instruction sparked intense public debate during this reporting period. Such instruction is required for students at elementary and secondary public schools. On June 11, the House of Representatives (DPR) passed the controversial National Education System Bill, which drew in part on "faith and piety" language recently included in the Constitution. The bill was largely supported by Muslims and largely rejected by Christians (see Section II, Restrictions on Religious Freedom). It states, among other things, that each student has the right to receive religious instruction by teachers of the same faith. Because few non-Muslims attend Muslim schools, such schools would likely be unaffected by the bill, and thus not required to hire non-Muslim teachers, create a program for a (non-Muslim) religion class, or create a space for worship by Christian or other students. However, many Catholic and Protestant churches, church groups, and schools viewed the bill as egregious state intervention into private religious affairs. They expressed concern that high-quality Christian schools which attract many Muslim students would be forced to hire fundamentalist Muslim teachers, create a program for an Islam class, and set up a mushollah (prayer room). Muslim supporters argued that the nation's moral decay required swift action to instill ethics and morality among its youth. Other Muslims said the bill was aimed at assuring Muslim parents that their children could, for instance, receive a high-quality Catholic school education without being forced to neglect or sacrifice their Muslim identity. Many Muslim intellectuals opposed the bill, saying it was too steeped in religion and that the goal of education should be enlightenment rather than piety. Political observers saw the bill's passage as pure politicking in the run-up to the 2004 elections. President Megawati signed the bill into law on July 8.

There are 15 political parties directly or partially affiliated with Islam: the United Development Party (PPP); the Star and Crescent Party (PBB); the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS); the Indonesian Muslim Awakening Party (KAMI); the Islamic Members' Party (PUI); the People's Development Party (PKU); the Masyumi Islamic Political Party (PPIM); the Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia Party (PIMSM); the United Islamic Party (PSII 1905); the Nahdlatul Members Party (PNU); the Unity Party (PP); the Democratic Islamic Party (PID); the National United Solidarity Party (PSUN); the Star of Reform Party (PBR); and the Reform Struggle Savior Party (PPPR). Former leaders of the Muhammadiyah and the NU led nationalist parties, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the National Awakening Party (PKB), which attempted to draw on grassroots support from their former Islamic social organizations.

The country has five Christian parties: the Indonesian Christian Party (Partindo); the National Indonesian Christian Party (KRISNA); the Catholic Democratic Party (PKD); the Catholic Party (PK); and the Democratic People's Devotion Party (PDKB). There is only one Buddhist party, the Indonesian Buddhist Party (Partai Budis Indonesia, or PARBUDI). In the last general election, in 1999, the 3 Christian parties in existence at the time received relatively few votes, while the 15 existing Muslim parties together garnered approximately 30 percent of the vote. Of the Muslim parties, those with moderate views on the role of Islam in government and society dominated. Parties that strongly advocated Islamization of government policy won a small percentage of the vote and few parliamentary seats.

The armed forces provide religious facilities and programs at all major housing complexes for servicemen and servicewomen who practice one of the five officially recognized religions. The Center for Mental Development oversees these facilities and programs. Each branch of the armed forces had an Agency for Mental Development chaired by a Chief of Spiritual Development. Christians often have their own prayer groups that meet on Fridays, coinciding with the Muslim prayer day. Some officers are qualified as preachers and perform this function as a voluntary additional duty, but civilian religious leaders conduct most religious services on military posts. Organized services and prayer meetings are available for members of each recognized religion. Although every military housing complex was required to provide a mosque, a Catholic church, a Protestant church, and worship centers or temples for Buddhists and Hindus, smaller compounds rarely offered facilities for all

five recognized religions, in part because no adherents to the smaller faiths were represented at every facility.

Religious groups and social organizations must obtain permits to hold religious concerts or other public events. Permits usually are granted in an unbiased manner, unless there is concern that the activity could anger members of another faith who live in the area.

Religious speeches are permitted if they are delivered to co-religionists and are not intended to convert persons of other faiths. However, televised religious programming is not restricted, and viewers can watch religious programs offered by any of the recognized faiths. In addition to many Muslim programs, ranging from religious instruction to talk shows on family issues, there are many Christian programs, including ones featuring televangelists, as well as programs by and for Buddhists and Hindus. Islamic television preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar, known popularly as Aa Gym, claimed a following of 80 million viewers during this reporting period. Another well-established Islamic television preacher, Zainuddin MZ, founded a political party.

Some Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist holidays are celebrated as national holidays. Muslim holidays celebrated during the period covered by this report included the Ascension of the Prophet (October 4), Idul Fitri (December 6 and 7), Idul Adah (February 12), the Muslim New Year (March 3), and the Prophet's Birthday (May 15). Nationally celebrated Christian holidays were Christmas Day (December 25), Good Friday (April 18), and the Ascension of Christ (May 30). Three other national holidays were the Hindu holiday Nyepi (April 2), the Buddhist holiday Waisak (May 16), and Chinese New Year (February 1), celebrated by Confucians and other Chinese. On Bali, all Hindu holy days became regional holidays, so public servants and others did not have to work on Saraswati Day, Galungan, and Kuningan.

A number of government officials and prominent religious and political leaders were involved in or supported interfaith groups, including the Society for Interreligious Dialog (MADIA), the Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement (GANDI), the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), the Indonesian Committee on Religion and Peace (also ICRP), the Institute for Interfaith Dialog (Interfidei), and Island Nation Solidarity (Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, certain policies, laws, and official actions restricted religious freedom, and the police and military occasionally tolerated discrimination against and abuse of religious groups by private actors.

Because the first tenet of the country's national doctrine, Pancasila, is the belief in one supreme God, atheism is prohibited; however, there were no reports of the repression of atheists.

The Government's requirement that all elementary and secondary school students undergo religious instruction at school is implemented in a way that restricts religious freedom. Students are ostensibly free to choose from five types of classes, representing Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, but this does not accommodate members of other faiths. Moreover, many young followers of the five recognized religions do not receive education in their faith, because in practice, few schools offer all five classes and many offer only one. As a result, a Buddhist schoolboy in a West Java area where Muslims are predominant, for example, may be obliged to receive instruction in Islam. In some cases, a sympathetic school would allow the boy to sit out the class without any academic penalty. Some schools would even seek a Buddhist volunteer from the community to provide religious instruction. Many parents of children of minority faiths resented having to subject their children to what they viewed as indoctrination. Supporters of the education bill, which Parliamentarians passed on June 11 (see Section II, Legal/Policy Framework), argued that it would solve this problem. However, the bill, which states that each student has the right to receive religious instruction by teachers of the same faith, created widespread concern that religious freedom would be further restricted in the field of education.

Jehovah's Witnesses stated that although they enjoyed a high degree of religious freedom, there were incidents in which their children ran into trouble at school for not taking part in the weekly flag salutation.

The Government continued to restrict the religious freedom of certain messianic Islamic groups. An official ban on the activities of the groups Jamaah Salamullah, Amadhiyah, and Darul Arqam remained in effect, based on a 1994 "fatwa" edict by the National Ulemas Council, or MUI. However, the Government did not take any action to enforce the ban, enabling the groups to stay in operation through the formation of companies that distribute "halal" goods.

Increasingly, hard-line religious groups used pressure, intimidation, or violence to silence those whose message they found offensive. In August 2002, Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia prompted a private television network to stop airing a commercial that featured the phrase "Colorful Islam," aimed at promoting tolerance and diversity. The group said the ad insulted Islam.

In December 2002, the Forum of Indonesian Clerics and Islamic Followers called on police to investigate a prominent Islamic intellectual, Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, for writing an article that urged a less literal interpretation of Islamic doctrine. The article stated that some aspects of Shari'a, such as cutting off the hands of thieves, might not be applicable in this culture and this century. The Bandung-based Indonesian People's Ulama Forum, a group of religious scholars, called the article an insult to Islam. They stated that according to Islam, a person who insulted Islam should be sentenced to death. However, police did not arrest Ulil, and the religious scholars later distanced themselves from their statement, saying they had not meant that Ulil should be sentenced to death.

The Government continued to restrict the construction and expansion of houses of worship, and maintained a ban on the use of private homes for worship unless the community approved and a regional office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs provided a license. Some Protestants complained that community approval was difficult to obtain and alleged that in some areas, even when the Muslim community did approve the construction of a new church, outside groups of Muslim activists arrived with a long list of signatures of those opposed to the project, and permission was subsequently denied. Some members of minority faiths, particularly Christians, complained that the Government made it much harder for them than for Muslims to build a house of worship. In addition, the Government said it routinely received complaints from Muslims in Papua, West Nusa Tenggara, North Sulawesi, and other provinces, reporting difficulties in establishing mosques in those regions.

The Government prohibits proselytizing by recognized religions on the grounds that such activity, especially in areas heavily dominated by another recognized religion, potentially is disruptive. A joint decree issued by the Ministries of Religion and Home Affairs in 1979 remains in effect, which prohibits members of one religion from trying to convert members of other faiths, including through bribes, persuasion, or distribution of religious materials. Door-to-door proselytizing also remained prohibited. However, the country's laws allow for conversion between faiths, and such conversions do occur (see Section II, Legal/Policy Framework).

Foreign religious organizations must obtain permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to provide any type of assistance (in-kind, personnel, and financial) to religious groups in the country. Although the Government generally did not enforce this requirement, some Christian groups stated that the Government applied it more frequently to minority groups than to mainstream Muslim groups.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain work visas, which some described as difficult to obtain or extend. Foreign missionaries who were granted such visas were able to work relatively unimpeded, although restrictions were imposed in conflict areas. However, to obtain permission for a visa the Government requires applicants to submit: a letter from the applicant's sponsor; a letter from the Indonesian Embassy in the applicant's country allowing the applicant to obtain a temporary stay visa; a resume; evidence demonstrating that the applicant has a skill that a citizen cannot offer; an approval letter from the Ministry's provincial director; a support letter from the Director General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; a letter from the receiving religious institution confirming that the applicant will work no more than 2 years in the country before being replaced by a local citizen; statistical information on the number of followers of the religion in the community; permission from regional security authorities for those who wish to extend their Temporary Stay Permission Card; and written approval from a Provincial or District Ministry of Religious Affairs Office, after the office consults with local government authorities. However, many missionaries work without such visas.

There are no restrictions on the publication of religious materials, and religious literature may be printed and religious symbols may be used. However, the Government bans the dissemination of these materials to persons of other faiths. There were no reports of the Government banning books because of their religious content during this reporting period. There were, however, unverified reports that Muslim and Christian radicals had circulated fraudulent copies of the Koran and Bible containing inaccurate and inflammatory passages.

The civil registration system continued to severely restrict religious freedom for persons whose religion is not one of the five officially recognized by the Government. Animists, Confucians, members of the Baha'i Faith, and others—along with many persons of Chinese descent, regardless of their religion—had difficulty obtaining a national identity card (KTP). The Government requires citizens to carry a KTP,

which lists the holder's religion. The Government requires a KTP to register marriages, divorces, and births. Some officials denied practitioners of minority religions a KTP outright, while others issued KTPs that inaccurately reflected the bearer's religious affiliation. For instance, many animists who were able to obtain a KTP found that they had been listed as Muslims. In November 2002, Surabaya officials reported to police a Confucian named Anly Cenggana who insisted that he receive a KTP that correctly identified his faith. The officials said Cenggana had "forced" sub-district staff to issue a KTP with a special column. The Surabaya government then revoked the card, citing a "technical typing error." Separately, it was reported that Bingky Irawan, Chairman of the Surabaya Indonesian Confucius Council, was unable to obtain an accurate KTP. The card issued to him listed his religion as Islam. Leaders of some religious groups claimed that Islam is the "default" category, and that this reflects a systematic attempt by the Government to overcount Muslim citizens and undercount other citizens. Some citizens who are unable to obtain any type of KTP had difficulty finding work. However, pervasive corruption within the Government enabled many KTP seekers to obtain a card of their liking.

Men and women of different religions faced serious obstacles to marrying and officially registering their marriages. According to interfaith groups, it was very difficult to find religious officials willing to perform interfaith marriage ceremonies and to register such marriages with the Government. As a result, some people converted—sometimes superficially—in order to get married. Others traveled overseas, where they wed and then registered the marriage at an Indonesian Embassy. In addition, despite being among the officially recognized faiths, Hindus stated that they frequently had to travel long distances in order to have their marriages registered because in many rural areas the local government could not or would not perform the registration.

Many of the religious communities that suffered discrimination in marriage registration also encountered difficulties in registering their children's births. Confucians had special difficulty in registering births. According to the MATAKIN, a Confucian advocacy group, births to Confucian women are recorded at the Civil Registration Office as being out of wedlock. Only the mother's name is recorded, not the father's, causing shame and embarrassment.

Several groups urged the Government to omit the category of religion from KTPs, including the Buddhist group the KASI, which raised the matter with Parliamentarians, and the Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII), an Islamic student movement within the NU. However, these groups made little if any progress during the period covered by this report. Activists noted bureaucratic resistance to change, and stated that the Muslim majority saw no need to lift the requirement.

Government employees must swear their allegiance to the nation and to the country's national ideology, Pancasila, the first tenet of which is the belief in one supreme God.

Within the armed forces, there were slight restrictions on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Ethno-religious representation in the general officer corps generally is proportional to the religious affiliation of the population at large; Javanese Muslims (the largest single ethnic group) dominate, but Christians are well represented in the general officer ranks (perhaps reflecting generally higher educational standards among the Christian communities). Some allege that promotion to the most senior ranks for Christians and other minorities is limited by a "glass ceiling." However, there is little evidence to support this claim. A Christian is currently serving as Chief of Staff of the Navy, and a Christian has in the past served as Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian Defense Forces. In addition there are high-ranking Hindu officers in the Armed Forces.

The law does not discriminate against any religious group in employment, education, housing, or health care; however, some religious minority groups allege that there is de facto discrimination that limits their access to top government jobs and slots at public universities.

In Aceh Province, there was concern over the March 3 creation of Islamic law (Shari'a) courts, following the Central Government's issuance of a presidential decree to that effect (see Section II, Legal/Policy Framework). Some citizens worried that Shari'a would be applied to non-Muslims or to Acehnese outside the province. Others, including some Muslims, expressed concern that law enforcement institutions would use new powers to interfere in private matters, including forcing people to wear "Islamic dress." As of the end of this reporting period, however, there was no evidence that the authorities had applied any aspect of Shari'a to non-Muslims, or had punished any Muslims for dress-code violations. Nevertheless, deep-seated concern remained among mainstream Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and others that the implementation of Shari'a, even in one region, would undermine the country's tradition of religious tolerance and plurality.

Several small fundamentalist Islamic groups called for the national adoption of Shari'a by adding a sentence to the Constitution stating that there is an "obligation for Muslims to adhere to the Islamic faith"—the so-called "Jakarta Charter." The debate over this provision dates back to the founding of the nation in 1945. Among those opposing changes to the Constitution during this reporting period were the two largest Muslim social organizations, the NU, and the Muhammadiyah, as well as Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, and Hindu organizations.

Local leaders in a number of predominantly Muslim areas introduced stricter Islamic legal practices during this reporting period. In the Pamekasan Regency of Madura Island, off the coast of East Java, the regent in November 2002 issued a ruling on the wearing of Muslim clothing, the setting aside of time for workers to perform group prayers, and the holding of a monthly religion awareness program. This followed the adoption of similar policies in the South Sulawesi regencies of Maros, Sinjai, and Gowa, and in the West Java regencies of Cianjur, Indramayu, and Garut. Indramayu is a source area for prostitution, and has high rates of divorce and child illegitimacy. Local officials instituted a morality campaign and required Government workers to set aside 30 minutes prior to starting their work to recite passages from the Holy Koran. Muslim intellectuals noted that in many cases, these regulations were imposed in response to requests from residents who were disillusioned with the high crime level and viewed stricter regulations as a way to correct the problem. Reports from South Sulawesi indicated that crime rates did, in fact, drop sharply following the introduction of stricter Islamic practices. However, there was energetic opposition to the new policies. Some legal experts warned that the regulations contradict the country's Constitution, while some residents, both Muslims and non-Muslims, complained that the Government was meddling in citizens' private lives.

In Hindu-majority Bali, a school in the capital city banned Islamic veils and jilbabs, prompting some Muslims to complain that their religious freedom was being violated. The school in question, a state-run junior high school, said all 774 of its students, including the 84 who were Muslim, were obliged to follow the school's code of conduct, and that this code forbade the use of veils or headscarves.

In 2002, prior to the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, the Jakarta Provincial Government issued a decree banning certain nightclubs and game centers from operating during Ramadan. Live-music venues were ordered to close by 12:30 a.m. Local leaders issued similar orders in Surabaya and other cities. Although enforcement of the order was lax, some members of minority faiths and even some Muslims complained about the restrictions.

Marriage law for Muslims is based on Shari'a and allows men to have up to four wives if the husband is able to provide equally for each of them. For a man to take a second, third, or fourth wife, court permission and the consent of the first wife is required. However, women reportedly find it difficult to refuse. During this reporting period, Islamic women's groups were divided over whether the country's marriage law for Muslims should be amended. In divorce cases, women often bear a heavier evidentiary burden than men in obtaining a divorce, especially in the Islam-based family court system, which features more than 300 courts across the nation. The law requires courts to oblige the former husband to provide alimony or its equivalent, but there is no enforcement of alimony payments, and divorced women rarely receive such support.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although the Government made significant efforts to reduce interreligious violence, such violence did occur during this reporting period, sometimes with official complicity. In addition, the Government on many occasions failed to punish perpetrators and prevent further attacks. The Government also at times tolerated the abuse of religious freedom by private groups.

On October 12, 2002, nearly simultaneous bombings of two nightclubs in Kuta, Bali killed at least 202 persons and injured hundreds more. The bombings were carried out in the name of religion by members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a terrorist organization committed to the goal of creating an Islamic super-state in Southeast Asia. The Government responded to the attack by arresting at least 32 people and initiating the prosecution of at least 19 of them. The Government also uncovered strong indications that JI members were involved in dozens of terrorist attacks in previous years, including the Christmas Eve 2000 bombings of churches across the archipelago, which killed 19 persons. The Government charged JI's leader, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, with treason, citing in his indictment the Christmas Eve bombings. His trial, which began in Jakarta in April, was ongoing at the end of this reporting period.

Areas of the Malukus and Central Sulawesi experienced episodes of interreligious and interethnic violence during the period covered by this report, although at far lower levels than in previous years. In the Malukus, Central Sulawesi, Papua, and Kalimantan, economic tensions between local or native persons (predominantly non-Muslim) and more recently arrived migrants (predominantly Muslim), who were seen by indigenous communities as economically advantaged, were a significant factor in incidents of interreligious and interethnic violence.

In the Malukus, home to large numbers of Muslims and Christians, at least 30 persons were killed and approximately 282,000 persons remained displaced due to violence during this reporting period. On July 27, 2002, in Ambon, 53 people were wounded when a bomb hidden in a pushcart exploded in a market packed with shoppers in a Christian neighborhood. On September 5, 2002, three young women died after a bomb went off near a sports field used by the city's rival Muslim and Christian communities. In January an attorney for detained members of Coker, an Ambonese Christian gang, stated that gang members had admitted carrying out many of the bombings in Ambon between 2000 and 2002, including attacks on Christian targets. The attorney said his clients claimed that members of the Army Special Forces (Kopassus) facilitated many of the attacks, providing instructions, weapons, and bombs. Police asserted that some Kopassus soldiers had assisted the Coker gang in committing various offenses. A senior military official claimed that police had tortured the gang members, and therefore called into question the veracity of the confessions. The International Crisis Group reported that at the height of the Malukus conflict, Army soldiers, including those from battalions 731, 732, and 733, had rented their weapons to militant Muslim fighters.

However, the government-brokered ceasefire signed on February 12, 2002, remained in place and largely kept the peace in Maluku and North Maluku. In part, this was due to the deployment of troops in key areas, and the departure of many outside extremists, particularly Muslim militiamen who had exacerbated the conflict. In October 2002, the Islamic militia Laskar Jihad disbanded, having killed large numbers of Malukan Christians and tipped the conflict's balance in favor of local Muslims. During that month, around 3,000 Laskar Jihad members left Maluku and Central Sulawesi for their home areas, mainly on Java, without facing arrest or prosecution for their crimes. Evidence indicates that by the time Laskar Jihad disbanded, other Muslim militias, such as Laskar Muhajidin, had already left the region. As of the end of this reporting period, there were conflicting reports regarding whether outside militiamen remained in the Malukus.

The Government charged Laskar Jihad's chief, Jafar Umar Thalib, with inciting religious violence and other minor offenses. On January 30, a Jakarta court acquitted Thalib, prompting human rights activists to suspect high-level intervention. Thalib's supporters hailed him as a nationalist and a defender of Islam. Earlier, while Thalib was in detention, Vice President Hamzah Haz had paid him a 90-minute private visit, inspired, he said, by a sense of "Muslim brotherhood." This visit fueled doubts about the Government's neutrality toward the Christian-Muslim conflict in Maluku, North Maluku and Central Sulawesi. A similar reaction followed a comment by military spokesman Maj. Gen. Sjafrie Sjamsuddin, who reportedly said Laskar Jihad's actions could not be classified as threats to national unity.

In Central Sulawesi, the government-brokered peace agreement signed in December 2001, the Malino Declaration, remained in force, but there were several relapses into interreligious violence. These incidents claimed at least 25 lives (down from approximately 75 in the previous 12-month period) and, as this reporting period came to a close, continued to displace 9,000 people. Unknown assailants carried out many of the attacks, including the August 2002 attacks in the Poso Regency villages of Matoko, Sepe, Silanca, and Malitu, in which large numbers of homes were burned. Police did not arrest any suspects in the separate, fatal shootings of two civilians in Poso in June. Laskar Jihad members left Central Sulawesi in October 2002, after the group was disbanded. In December 2002, members of Laskar Jundullah ("Army of God"), a militia that in earlier years took part in holy war against Christians in Maluku and Central Sulawesi, bombed a restaurant and a car dealership in Makassar, Central Sulawesi. There are indications that these bombings were aimed not only at inflaming interreligious tensions but also at sending a message to a Cabinet minister who played a key role in brokering the Malino Declaration. Laskar Jundullah's leader, Agus Dwikarna, had been jailed in the Philippines in July 2002 after he was found carrying bomb-making materials at Manila's airport.

Some Christians criticized the arrest, trial, and conviction of Rev. Rinaldy Damanik, a leader of the Christian community in Central Sulawesi. The police have stated that Reverand Damanik was in one of a group of cars that was found to contain a variety of weapons when searched by authorities. On June 16, a Palu court found him guilty of weapons possession and sentenced him to three years in prison.

Damanik maintained his innocence throughout and said he would appeal the verdict. Some of his supporters argued that he had been framed; others said he was being persecuted for being a Christian who spoke out for his community.

Some Christians also criticized the January 28 conviction of Alex Manuputty, a Christian separatist leader sentenced to 3 years in prison for subversion. Manuputty, chairman of the Maluku Sovereignty Front (FKM), was convicted of planning a rebellion in the Malukus.

At least 25 churches across the archipelago were destroyed during this reporting period. In Poso, Central Sulawesi, mobs burned down six churches between August 4 and 15, 2002, and mobs on the North Maluku island of Halmahera burned down three churches on September 15, 2002. On the Central Sulawesi island of Haruku, communal violence destroyed five churches on September 18, 2002. Churches were also burned, bombed, or otherwise destroyed in the cities of Bandung, Bekasi, and Sumedang, West Java; Bantul, Central Java; Medan, Sumatra; Makassar, South Sulawesi; and Palu, Central Sulawesi. Mobs forcibly closed at least one church during this period. On September 6, 2002, a local government in Bandung issued a letter ordering the closure of a Batak HKBP church that had been in operation for 11 years. On November 6, 2002, after the church's roughly 300 member families refused to comply with the order, a 100-strong mob attacked the church. The mob, reportedly led by an official of the Mosque Security Council (FSDKM), succeeded in forcing worshippers to leave the premises. As of June, the congregation was still unable to use the church.

At least three mosques were attacked during this reporting period. One was destroyed and two were damaged. All three belonged to the nonorthodox Amadhiyah community, which some Muslims reject as deviant. From September 10 to 13, 2002, in the East Lombok town of Selong, thousands of orthodox Muslims attacked an Amadhiyah mosque, burning the structure and a number of nearby houses and shops. Three hundred and forty residents reportedly fled. On the night of December 23, 2002, in the village of Manior Lor, Kuningan District, West Java, a mob of orthodox Muslims attacked two Amadhiyah mosques, but the congregation did not flee the area. On October 7, 2002, in the Lombok village of Batuyong, a mob forced followers of the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute (LDII), a messianic Islamic group, to leave the village. The attackers, angered by the Government's lack of action against what they viewed as a deviant sect, burned 13 homes of LDII followers. The congregation fled but later returned. On December 9, 2002, in the Central Sulawesi village of Moutong, a clash between two groups of Muslims reportedly left two people dead and seven houses burned. The clash reportedly occurred when one group of residents, who follow mainstream Islamic teachings, became upset with what they considered the extreme ideology preached by LDII members who had entered their area.

On July 14, 2002, a Protestant sailor offended Catholic parishioners in the town of Maumere on the predominantly Catholic island of Flores, sparking a riot. Instead of venting their anger at a Protestant church, the thousands of rioters attacked a mosque. Some residents concluded that outside elements had purposely provoked communal unrest.

A number of ethnic Balinese Hindus who had migrated to Central Sulawesi were attacked by Muslims between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002. However, during the current reporting period, no such attacks were reported.

Other conflicts involving members of different religions occurred in various parts of the country, including disputes in Kalimantan between ethnic Madurese, who are predominantly Muslim, and indigenous Dayaks, who are predominantly Christian. However, these disputes stemmed primarily from ethnic and economic factors, not theological differences.

Although the conflict in Aceh is sometimes cast in religious overtones, the fighting there has little to do with religion and much to do with economic and historical grievances. There were, however, instances in which religious freedom was abused in Aceh during this reporting period. In June leaders of four Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Blangpidie, southeast Aceh, presented themselves to Government authorities to make clear that there was no truth in statements made by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) that the four influential individuals supported the pro-independence movement. GAM allegedly made the statement to drum up support among local residents.

Video compact disks (VCDs) containing religiously inflammatory material garnered public attention during the reporting period. In March the Indonesian Muslim Solidarity Movement called on Jakarta police to investigate those responsible for producing and distributing Christian VCDs that alleged that KH Zainuddin MZ, a well-known Islamic preacher, was in fact a Christian who had been baptized and whose child attended Sunday school. Zainuddin himself rejected the allegations and

filed a defamation lawsuit against Protestant minister Muhammad Filemon. Police opened an investigation that was still underway at the end of this reporting period.

There were no religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. This coincided with a continuing de-escalation of violence in the country's main areas of interreligious conflict: the eastern provinces of Maluku, North Maluku, and Central Sulawesi.

Between July 1, 2000, and June 30, 2001, extremists forced thousands of Christians and hundreds of Muslims to convert in these provinces. Between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002, most such individuals reverted to their former faith. During the current reporting period, others who had not yet reverted to their original faith did so. Meanwhile, some, such as former Christians on the island of Bula, made the decision to remain members of their new faith. In a few areas, such as the Seram village of Tamher Warat, Christians who had been forced to embrace Islam were reportedly still afraid to revert to their former faith, and were still using their Muslim names. The Government and religious leaders took steps to promote religious freedom among residents and former residents of Kasui island, some of whom had been forcibly converted. An Ambon-based Christian group said some Muslim residents were angry that former Kasui Christians who had been forced to convert had publicized their experience. There were unconfirmed reports that local government officials, largely village heads, were complicit in some of the mass conversions in 2000 and 2001.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government made some progress in improving respect for religious freedom. In particular, progress was made toward ending the interreligious violence that in previous years killed thousands of people and, during this reporting period, prevented the return of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in the provinces of Maluku, North Maluku, and Central Sulawesi.

After Christian and Muslim community leaders signed the government-brokered Malino Declaration (Malino I) (on Sulawesi) and followed up by signing Malino II (on the Malukus), the Government sent in large numbers of troops and police, and many Java-based Islamic extremists left the area. Interreligious violence plummeted, and peaceful conditions prompted many displaced persons to return to their homes. These returns were facilitated by NGOs and the Government, which earmarked $11.2 million for the construction of homes for returnees. Progress was most significant in Central Sulawesi, where the number of displaced persons fell by more than 100,000. A series of sniper attacks hindered the return process in mid-2002, but by May the number of displaced persons in the province fell to approximately 9,000. In the Malukus, Christian-Muslim reconciliation made considerable progress, but there was less progress in achieving the return of displaced persons. In Maluku there were approximately 233,000 displaced persons in May, down from 256,000 ten months earlier, while in North Maluku, 49,000 remained displaced.

Although the Government at times failed to hold accountable individuals who had fostered or carried out religious violence, the Government did take some actions. On October 19, 2002, the Government announced the arrest for treason of JI leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, citing the Christmas Eve 2000 bombings as an example of the group's efforts to overthrow the Government and create an Islamic state. The attacks killed 19 persons and injured at least 120 others.

The Government organized a number of 15-day seminars aimed at promoting reconciliation between Christians and Muslims from the Maluku capital of Ambon and other areas. The Government also promoted religious harmony by sending officials from various religious institutes to areas of current or potential conflict, where they held discussions with local religious leaders. In the Malukus, Christian and Muslim leaders also held their own meetings to build trust between the communities. The Sultan of Yogyakarta chaired one such meeting, held in Ambon from January 9 to 11.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious intolerance remained a matter of growing concern to many Indonesians during the period covered by this report. After police arrested religious extremists in the wake of the October 12, 2002, Bali bombings, many Indonesians refused to believe that their countrymen could have carried out the attack. This changed, how-

ever, after a number of the terrorists confessed and the public became aware of evidence in the case.

For many years there has been growing Islamic awareness among Indonesian Muslims and increasing displays of public piety. During this reporting period many Christians, members of other minority faiths, and even some non-practicing Muslims expressed discomfort at the increasing number of public expressions of Islam. The numbers of political parties and businesses associated with Islam (see Section II), religious schools (pesantrens and madrasahs), community prayer rooms (mushollahs) and Shari'a banks all grew, and in March the Government announced the development of Shari'a-based financial instruments. The popular tabloid magazine "Sabili" named detained terror suspect Abu Bakar Ba'asyir as its 2002 Man of the Year. More young women, especially those in high school and university, donned headscarves or "jilbab." Muslim-only housing estates attracted more attention. Bookshops did a brisk trade in fiction with Islamic themes, and Koranic verses were distributed via SMS message. The number of citizens making the Hajj (Muslim pilgrimage) was expected to reach 200,000 in 2003, a figure that would mark a slight increase from the previous year.

In general, Islam in the country remained tolerant, with a pluralistic outlook. In May a comprehensive survey by the Pew Research Center asked Muslims whether they felt that Islam should tolerate diverse interpretations of its teachings. A majority (54 percent) said yes, while 44 percent said there is only one true interpretation of Islam.

With the removal of Suharto-era restrictions on religious organizations and expression, there have been some public calls by a minority of Muslims for the creation of an Islamic state. Ten percent or fewer of the country's Muslims advocate creating an Islamic state or including the Jakarta Charter in the Constitution. The vast majority of these individuals pursue their goal through peaceful means, but a small, vocal minority condones coercive measures and has resorted to violence. Extremist groups advocating coercion and resorting to violence include: Laskar Jihad (now disbanded), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the Hizbullah Front, the Laskar Mujahidin, the Laskar Jundullah, the Islamic Youth Movement (GPI), and the Surakarta Islamic Youth Forum (FPIS). Many of the country's religious minorities expressed growing concern over what they perceived to be increasing demands by certain Muslim groups to impose Shari'a law in the country.

In the easternmost province of Papua, Muslims constitute a religious minority except in the districts of Sorong and Fakfak, where they account for roughly half the population. Most ethnic Papuans practice Christianity and/or animism. In recent years, migration has changed Papua's ethnic and religious composition. The arrival of Muslim migrants occasionally led to tensions between indigenous Papuans and new arrivals. However, these tensions had less to do with religion than with economics. During this reporting period, interreligious relations were generally good in Papua. However, in May militiamen from at least one Muslim Papuan village helped the military carry out an operation in the Central Highlands in which many homes were burned. This assistance threatened to inflame historical enmities between Muslim- and non-Muslim-majority villages in the province. Early in this reporting period, there were NGO reports that Laskar Jihad, responsible for the deaths of many Malukan Christians, was present in Papua in considerable numbers. Some observers speculated that the military had assisted in bringing them into the province. However, by June an exodus of Laskar Jihad members appeared to have occurred and it was not clear how many, if any, remained.

Economic tensions between local or native peoples (predominantly non-Muslim) and more recently arrived migrants (predominantly Muslim) were a significant factor in incidents of interreligious and inter-ethnic violence in the Malukus, Central Sulawesi, Papua, and Kalimantan.

Societal attitudes of some persons, particularly those in rural areas, where roughly 70 percent of citizens reside, are shaped by belief in shamanism. In late 2002, a court in Cianjur, West Java, sentenced to between 6 and 10 years in prison 20 persons convicted of killing an alleged shaman in November 2000.

Some notable advances in interreligious tolerance and cooperation occurred during this reporting period, including at Christmastime 2002. With fears still running high over a repeat of the Christmas 2000 violence, many Muslims joined ranks with their Christian neighbors to protect churches and cathedrals across the country. In the first half of 2003, many Muslims and Christians in Maluku and Central Sulawesi worked together to repair mosques and churches. In Bali, where some feared that the October 12, 2002, bombings would strain relations between the island's Hindu majority and Muslim minority, no confrontations were reported. A leader of the Muslim community in the Legian area, Haji Agus Bambang Priyanto, received praise for organizing the evacuation of survivors of the attack. Later, rep-

resentatives of almost every religious group active in the country took part in an elaborate cleansing ritual held by Hindu leaders.

Similarly, interfaith organizations remained active during this reporting period, and attracted media coverage. Among them were the Society for Interreligious Dialog (MADIA), the Indonesia Anti-Discrimination Movement (GANDI), the Interfidei, the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), and the Indonesian Committee on Religion and Peace (also called ICRP), the Indonesian Peace Forum (INFID), and the Institute of Gender and Religious Studies. The GANDI worked to repeal regulations it considered discriminatory, particularly toward ethnic Chinese citizens. The MADIA held seminars and discussions on problems related to respect for basic human rights.

Other private organizations also promoted respect for religious freedom. The Islamic Liberal Network (JIL), an alliance of Muslim intellectuals who aim to stimulate debate on Islamic topics, confronted what they perceived as the growing influence of fundamentalism by participating in dialog via Internet, radio, newspaper and television, and paid visits to institutes of higher learning. In East Java, the Averroes Foundation, a Muslim youth group, published books and held discussions and seminars aimed at promoting religious tolerance and interreligious dialog. Members of the PMII joined with other religious youth groups, including members of the Association of Indonesian Hindu Students (KMHDI); the Republic of Indonesia Catholic Students Union (PMKRI); and the Hikma Budi, a Buddhist youth group, to foster religious tolerance.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Many of these discussions focused on religious freedom in the Malukus and Central Sulawesi. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders and human rights campaigners in order to promote respect for religious freedom. They also met regularly with officials of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the country's two largest Islamic social organizations, to clarify U.S. policy and discuss religious tolerance and other issues.

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 who were displaced by conflicts. Many of these efforts involved cooperation with CARE, Mercy Corps, World Vision, Church World Service, Catholic Relief Services, International Medical Corps or the Consortium for Assistance to Refugees Displaced in Indonesia (CARDI). Although some of these organizations are faith-based, there is no bias toward beneficiaries; faith and ethnic origin play no role in the targeting or distribution of assistance.

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. The U.S. Embassy and the American-Indonesian Exchange Foundation continued to support the country's first graduate-level comparative religion program at Gadja Mada University in Yogyakarta.

JAPAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were a few restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog on and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 145,902 square miles, and its population is an estimated 127 million. Regular participation in formal religious activities by the public is low, and an accurate determination of the proportions of adherents to specific religions is difficult. According to the latest statistics published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in March, approximately 49.7 percent of citizens adhered to Shintoism, 44.5 percent to Buddhism, 5.0 percent to so-called "new" religions, and 0.8 percent to Christianity. However, Shintoism and Buddhism are not mutually exclusive religions, and the figures do not represent the ratio of actual practitioners; most members claim to observe both. All other faiths are classified as "new religions" and include both local chapters of international religions such as the Unification Church of Japan and the Church of Scientology, as well as faiths founded in the country, such as Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, Perfect Liberty, and Risho Koseikai. A small segment of the population, predominantly foreign-born residents, attend Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic services.

There are 28 Buddhist schools recognized by the Government under the 1951 Religious Corporation Law. The major Buddhist schools are Tendai, Shingon, Joudo, Zen, Nichiren, and Nara. In addition to traditional Buddhist orders, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, including the Soka Gakkai, which has more than 8 million members. The three main schools of Shintoism are Jinja, Kyoha, and Shinkyoha. Among Christians, Catholics and a number of Protestant denominations enjoy modest followings.

According to an April 2001 Justice Ministry report, the Aum Shinrikyo group, which lost its religious status following its 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, was renamed Aleph and had an estimated 1,650 followers, a decrease from 10,000 in 1995. However, in May 2002, Aum Shinrikyo/Aleph claimed to have only 1,187 members.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are a few restrictions.

In response to Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks in 1995, a 1996 amendment to the Religious Corporation Law gives the authorities increased oversight of religious groups and requires greater disclosure of financial assets by religious corporations. The Diet enacted two additional laws in 1999 aimed at regulating the activities of Aum Shinrikyo/Aleph.

Some Buddhist and Shinto temples and shrines receive public support as national historic or cultural sites. In 1997 the Supreme Court ruled that a prefectural government may not contribute public funds to only one religious organization if the donations will support, encourage, and promote a specific religious group; however, no cases questioning the use of public funds in connection with a religious organization have been brought since 1998.

The Government does not require that religious groups be registered or licensed; however, to receive official recognition as a religious organization, which brings tax benefits and other advantages, a group must register as a "religious corporation." In practice, almost all religious groups register. The Cultural Affairs Agency listed 182,687 registered religious groups as of December 2001. In recent years, however, the Cultural Affairs Agency has estimated that as many as 5,000 of these groups are dormant, and the agency has taken legal action in an attempt to remove them from its registry. Since 1998 courts have accepted requests by the Cultural Affairs Agency to dissolve at least three dormant religious bodies that were registered under the Religious Corporation Law.

There are no known restrictions on proselytizing.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Aum Shinrikyo group (renamed Aleph), which lost its religious status following its 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, remained under government surveillance.

Members of the Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to allege that police do not act in response to allegations of forced deprogramming of church members. They claim that police do not enforce the laws against kidnapping when the victim is held by family members and that Unification Church members are subjected to prolonged detention by individuals, whom the police do not charge. In August 2002, the courts declared "deprogramming" illegal in a case involving Jehovah's Witnesses. However, during the year, the Supreme Court rejected the Unification Church's appeal in a case involving charges against family and friends of

church members for kidnaping and "deprogramming." In the Unification Church's case, the court determined that the causes of the appeal were not matters involving a violation of the Constitution.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In November 2001, the Toyama District Court sentenced a woman to a 1-year suspended sentence for the theft of 4 copies of a religious text from a Muslim place of worship. In May 2001 the woman had thrown a defaced copy of the Koran at a place of business owned by a Muslim foreign resident. The defendant claimed that she had committed the act to embarrass her family publicly.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights, including the promotion of religious freedom internationally. The U.S. Embassy maintains periodic contact with representatives of religious organizations.

KIRIBATI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, an island state of approximately 265 square miles, has a population of approximately 90,000. Missionaries introduced Christianity into the area in the mid-19th century. According to 2002 government statistics, major religious groups include: The Roman Catholic Church (55 percent); the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC), formerly the Congregational Church (37 percent); the Seventh-day Adventists (2 percent); the Baha'i Faith (2 percent); and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (3 percent). Persons with no religious preference account for about 5 percent of the population.

Missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints operate a school in Tarawa and recruit among the I-Kiribati, the ethnic majority, for missionaries to work within the country and in other Pacific island nations. The Church also sponsors a number of scholarships for I-Kiribati to attend Brigham Young University in Hawaii.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state or politically dominant religion. The Government does not favor a particular religion, nor are there separate categories for different religions.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there ramifications for not registering.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Christianity, the religion of more than 90 percent of the population, is a dominant social and cultural force, but there are amicable relations among the country's religions.

Nonbelievers, who constitute a very small percentage of the residents, do not suffer discrimination. Virtually all governmental and social functions begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister, cleric, or church official.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in its overall dialog of policy of promoting human rights.

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA[1]

The Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief;" however, in practice the Government discourages organized religious activity, except that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. Genuine religious freedom does not exist.

There was no change in the extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The regime appears to have cracked down on unauthorized religious groups in recent years; there are unconfirmed reports of the killing of members of underground Christian churches. In addition, religious persons who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating in the People's Republic of China (PRC) appear subject to arrest and harsh penalties, according to several unconfirmed reports. In the late 1980's, there was some easing of religious discrimination policies, and Government sponsored religious groups that were established at that time continue to operate. The Government has allowed foreigners to attend Government-sponsored religious services.

No information was available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom.

The U.S. government has raised its concerns about the deplorable state of religious freedom in North Korea at occasional meetings with North Korean officials.

The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and information about religious freedom in the country is limited. The Government maintains tight and effective control on information on conditions in the country. Since 2001, the Secretary of State has designated the DPRK as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

The Government does not allow representatives of foreign governments, journalists, or other visitors the freedom of movement that would enable them to assess fully human rights conditions in the country. This report is based on information obtained over more than a decade, updated where possible by information drawn from recent interviews, reports, and other documentation. While limited in detail, this information is indicative of the religious freedom situation in the country during the period covered by this report.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 47,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 21 million. The number of religious believers is unknown but has been estimated by the Government at 10,000 Protestants, 10,000 Buddhists,

[1] The United States does not have an embassy in North Korea. This report draws heavily on non-U.S. Government sources.

and 4,000 Catholics. Estimates by South Korean church-related groups are considerably higher. In addition the Chondogyo Young Friends Party, a government-approved group based on a traditional religious movement, has approximately 40,000 practitioners. There has been a limited revival of Buddhism with the translation and publication of Buddhist scriptures that had been carved on 80,000 wooden blocks and kept at the Haeinsa temple in the South. It is not known whether any Catholic priests, whose role is a fundamental element for the practice of the Catholic faith, remain in the country. In 2002, according to a South Korean press report, the chairman of the Association of North Korean Catholics stated that the Catholic community in the North had no priests, but held weekly prayer services at the Changchung Catholic Church in Pyongyang.

Two Protestant churches under lay leadership—the Pongsu and Chilgok churches—and the Changchung Roman Catholic church have been open since 1988 in Pyongyang. One of the Protestant churches is dedicated to the memory of former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's mother, Kang Pan Sok, who was a Presbyterian deacon. Several foreigners residing in Pyongyang attend Korean services at these churches on a regular basis. Although some foreigners who have visited the country over the years stated that church activity appears staged, others believe that church services are genuine, although sermons contain both religious and political content supportive of the regime. The Government claims, and some visitors agree, that there are more than 500 authorized "house churches." Hundreds of religious figures have visited the country in recent years, including papal representatives, the Reverend Billy Graham, and religious delegations from the Republic of Korea, the United States, and other countries. Vatican representatives, including Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Vatican Undersecretary for Relations with States, visited the country in November 2000 and in May 2002. On each occasion, the delegation reported meeting with the Catholic community in Pyongyang and with officials of the Association of North Korean Catholics. During the 2002 visit, the delegation celebrated the Feast of the Ascension with the local and international Catholic community at the Changchung Church in Pyongyang. In July 2001, a delegation from the Seoul Archdiocese of the Catholic Church visited the country and met with officials of the Association of North Korean Catholics.

Foreign religious activity is frequently connected with humanitarian relief, and overseas religious relief organizations have been active in responding to the country's food crisis. An overseas Buddhist group has been operating a factory in the Najin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone since 1998 to produce food for preschool children. A noodle factory established by contributions from Catholics of the Seoul Archdiocese opened in 2001. The Unification Church, which has business ventures in the country, is constructing an interfaith religious facility in Pyongyang.

There are an estimated 300 Buddhist temples in the country. Most of the temples are regarded as cultural relics, but religious activity is permitted in some of them. On June 4, 2002, Kim Jong Il visited the Ryangchon Buddhist temple in South Hamgyong Province. Although his comments during the visit centered on preserving the country's cultural relics, his appearance at any religious site is noteworthy.

There are unconfirmed reports of underground Christian churches. Some older citizens who were religious believers before 1953 reportedly have maintained their faith in secret over the years.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief;" however, in practice the Government discourages organized religious activity, except that which is supervised by officially recognized groups. Genuine religious freedom does not exist. The Constitution also stipulates that religion "should not be used for purposes of dragging in foreign powers or endangering public security."

"Juche," or self-reliance, the Government's state ideology, and the personality cult of "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-Il, have become a kind of civil religion used by the Government as a "spiritual" underpinning for its rule. Refusal on religious or other grounds to accept the leader as the supreme authority exemplifying the State and society's needs is regarded as opposition to the national interest.

During and immediately after the Korean War of 1950–53, the Government identified large numbers of religiously active persons as "counterrevolutionaries," and many of them were killed or imprisoned in concentration camps. The peak of this oppression was in the early 1970's when a constitutional revision added a clause regarding "freedom of antireligious activity." The Government began to moderate its religious discrimination policies in the late 1980's, when it launched a campaign highlighting Kim Il Sung's "benevolent politics." As part of this campaign, the re-

gime allowed the formation of several government-sponsored religious organizations. These organizations serve as interlocutors with foreign church groups and international aid organizations. Foreigners who have met with representatives of these organizations believe that some members are genuinely religious but note that others appear to know little about religious dogma or teaching. These organizations continue to operate, and visits by foreign religious figures have increased. However, the Government appears to have continued to suppress unauthorized religious groups in recent years. In particular, religious persons 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, according to several unconfirmed reports. A constitutional change in 1992 deleted the clause regarding freedom of antireligious propaganda, authorized religious gatherings, and provided for "the right to build buildings for religious use."

Efforts at national reconciliation since the inter-Korean summit in mid-June 2000 have increased North-South contacts. Civic groups and religious organizations in the South have been active in efforts to promote inter-Korean reconciliation. Discussions between these groups and their Northern counterparts generally have been limited to promoting social and cultural exchanges. The impact of these contacts on religious freedom in North Korea is unclear.

Several schools for religious education exist in North Korea. There are 3-year colleges for training Protestant and Buddhist clergy. A religious studies program also was established at Kim Il Sung University in 1989; its graduates usually go on to work in the foreign trade sector. A Protestant seminary was reopened in 2000 with assistance from foreign missionary groups. Critics, including at least one foreign sponsor, charged that the Government opened the seminary only to facilitate reception of assistance funds from foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

According to a 2002 *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea*, issued by the Korea Institute for National Unification, "there are no genuine religious practitioners in North Korea." The report notes though, that "some people are officially recognized as practicing religion, but in fact they are there to facilitate foreign aid or for purposes of international propaganda."

Persons engaging in religious proselytizing may be arrested and subjected to harsh penalties, including imprisonment and prolonged detention without charge. The Government appears concerned that faith-based South Korean relief and refugee assistance efforts along the northeast border with the PRC may become entwined with more political goals, including overthrow of the regime. An article in the Korean Workers Party newspaper in 1999 criticized "imperialists and reactionaries" for trying to use ideological and cultural infiltration, including religion, to destroy socialism from within.

Little is known about the day-to-day life of religious persons in the country. Members of government-recognized religious groups do not appear to suffer discrimination. In fact, some reports claim, and circumstantial evidence suggests, that many, if not most, have been mobilized by the regime. Persons whose parents were believers but who themselves do not practice religion are able to rise to at least the middle levels of the bureaucracy, despite their family background. In the past, such individuals suffered broad discrimination. Members of underground churches connected to border missionary activity appear to be regarded as subversive elements.

In July 2001, the U.N. Human Rights Committee noted "with regret" that the Government was unable to provide up-to-date information about religious freedom in the country. The Committee also noted, "in the light of information available to the Committee that religious practice is repressed or strongly discouraged" in the country, its concern regarding the authorities' practice with respect to religious freedom. The Committee requested that the Government provide the Committee with up-to-date information regarding the number of citizens belonging to religious communities and the number of places of worship, as well as "practical measures taken by the authorities to guarantee freedom of exercise of religious practice" by the religious communities in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government deals harshly with all opponents, including those engaging in religious practices deemed unacceptable to the regime. 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. Defectors interviewed by a former humanitarian aid worker claimed that Christians were imprisoned and tortured for reading

the Bible and talking about God, and that some Christians were subjected to biological warfare experiments. The Government effectively bars outside observers from confirming these reports.

In April 1999 and in May and June 2002, witnesses testified before Congress on the treatment of persons held in prison camps through the early 1990's. The witnesses stated that prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally were treated worse than other inmates. One witness, a former prison guard, testified that because the authorities taught "all religions are opium," those believing in God were regarded as insane. He recounted an instance in which a woman was kicked repeatedly and left with her injuries unattended for days because a guard overheard her praying for a child who was being beaten. Another individual testified that in 1990, while serving a sentence in a prison that had a cast-iron factory, she witnessed the killing of several elderly Christians by security officers who poured molten iron on them after they refused to renounce their religion and accept the state ideology of juche.

The collective weight of anecdotal evidence over the years of harsh treatment of unauthorized religious activity lends credence to such reports. Reports of executions, torture, and imprisonment of religious persons in the country continue to emerge.

The regime appears to have cracked down on unauthorized religious groups in recent years, especially persons who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border with China. There were unconfirmed reports that persons who proselytize or were repatriated and found to have contacted Christian missionaries outside the North were severely punished or executed. News reports indicated that the Government had taken steps to tighten control and increase punishments at the Chinese border, increasing the award for information on any person doing missionary work. One South Korean missionary asserted that the Government was conducting "education sessions" as a means for identifying Christian leaders so that they could be apprehended.

There is no reliable information on the number of religious detainees or prisoners, but there are unconfirmed reports that some of those detained in the country are detained because of their religion.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There was no information available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom. The regime does not allow representatives of foreign governments, journalists, or other visitors the freedom of movement that would enable them to assess religious freedom in the country fully.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States does not have diplomatic relations with the DPRK and has no official presence there. During talks in Pyongyang in October 2002, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs highlighted U.S. concerns about the deplorable human rights record, including religious freedom, of the North Korean regime. Also during 2002, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions inside North Korea through speeches before U.S. audiences and testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. The U.S. regularly raises these concerns about North Korea in multilateral fora and bilaterally with other governments. U.S. officials urge other countries to condition their bilateral relations with North Korea on concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvements.

The U.S. Government provided the National Endowment for Democracy with $250,000 for sub-grants to two South Korean NGOs to support monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in North Korea. Radio Free Asia also provides regular Korean-language broadcasting.

The U.S. Government worked to achieve passage for the first time of a resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea, as well as the DPRK's deplorable record on religious freedom, during the 59th session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The resolution condemned the North Korean Government for its human rights abuses, including the use of torture and forced labor, as well as restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The resolution called on the Government to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments

to which it is a party, invite U.N. special representatives to visit North Korea, and ensure that humanitarian organizations have free access to the country.

The country is a closed society and is extremely averse and resistant to outside influences. 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. Since 2001, the Secretary of State designated the DPRK as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 38,023 square miles, and its population is approximately 48 million. According to the most recent government survey, taken in 1995 (when the population was 44,600,000), the country's major religions and the number of adherents of each at that time were: Buddhism, 10,321,012; Protestantism, 8,760,336; Roman Catholicism, 2,950,730; Confucianism, 210,927; Won Buddhism, 86,923; and other religions, 267,996. There were 21,593,000 citizens who did not practice any religion. While the population has increased since 1995, the percentage of adherents of each faith has remained approximately the same in recent years. The next survey will be conducted in 2005. Although no official figures are available for the number of adherents of other religions, these include the Elijah Evangelical Church, the Jesus Morning Star Church, and the All People's Holiness Church. Muslims, members of the Unification Church, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Buddhism has approximately 38 orders. The Catholic Church has 15 dioceses, including one based in Seoul. There are 83 Protestant denominations, including the Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, and the Korean Gospel Church Assembly. Among those practicing a faith, 41.7 percent reported that they attended religious services or rituals at a temple or church at least once per week. Six percent responded that they attended religious services 2 to 3 times per month; 9.4 percent attended once per month; 6.8 percent attended once every 2 to 3 months; 26.9 percent attended once per year; and 9.2 percent did not attend services. Among practicing Buddhists, 1.2 percent responded that they attended religious services. A total of 71.5 percent of Protestants and 60.4 percent of Catholics responded that they attended religious services.

There are 17 Protestant and 6 Catholic missionary groups operating in the country. The Protestant groups include: Christians in Action, Korea; the Church of the Nazarene, Korea Mission; the Overseas Mission Fellowship; and World Opportunities International, Korea Branch. The Catholic missionary groups include the Missionaries of Guadeloupe, the Prado Sisters, and the Little Brothers of Jesus.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is no state religion, and the Government does not subsidize or favor a particular religion.

There are no government-established requirements for religious recognition. To protect cultural properties such as Buddhist temples, in 1987 the Government instituted the Traditional Temples Preservation Law. In accordance with this law, Buddhist temples receive some subsidies from the Government for their preservation and upkeep.

In accordance with the March 1, 1999 change in the Immigration Control Law, foreign missionary groups no longer are required to register with the Government.

The Government does not require or permit religious instruction in public schools. Private schools are free to hold religious activities.

The Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism takes the lead in organizing groups such as the Korea Religious Council and the Council for Peaceful Religions to promote interfaith dialog and understanding. The Bureau also is responsible for planning regular events such as the Religion and Art Festival, the Seminar for Religious Leaders, and the Symposium for Religious Newspapers and Journalists.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In August 1998, Catholic priest Moon Kyu Hyun was arrested on charges of violating the National Security Law after returning from North Korea, where he allegedly wrote praises for Kim Il Sung in a North Korean visitor's book and participated in a North Korean-sponsored reunification festival in Panmunjom. The eight other priests who traveled with him were not arrested, and Father Moon's arrest apparently was not based on his religious beliefs. He was released on bail in October 1998. In May 2000, Father Moon was sentenced to 2 years in prison and granted a 2-year stay of the execution of the sentence, equivalent to probation or a suspended sentence. He appealed this decision, and at a hearing of his appeal in May 2002, the court sentenced him to 8 months' imprisonment (a reduction of the original 2-year sentence) and again granted him a 2-year stay of the sentence. Father Moon lodged a final appeal, which was dismissed by the Supreme Court in February.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations among religious groups generally are amicable and free of incident, and religious tolerance is widespread. In 2000 there were press reports of so-called "Protestant fanatics" damaging Buddhist temples and artifacts through vandalism and arson. In mid-2000, a Christian was arrested for vandalism of Dong Kuk University, a Buddhist institution, and of some small temples. Such reports generated calls for religious tolerance and mutual respect in the media and among the general public. However, such incidents are rare, and religious leaders regularly meet both privately and under government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. These meetings are given wide and favorable coverage by the media.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. embassy officials also meet regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to human rights.

LAOS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in practice. Some government officials committed abuses of citizens' religious freedom.

The Government's poor record of respect for religious freedom continued to improve moderately in some parts of the country but deteriorated in other regions. The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), the popular front organization for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), is responsible for oversight of religious practice. The LFNC was instrumental in drafting regulations, released as a prime ministerial decree (Decree 92) in July 2002, aimed at clarifying the rights and responsibilities of religious practitioners and ending ambiguity that had led to abuses of religious freedom. The decree was a factor in the improved climate of religious tolerance that some provinces experienced. However, Decree 92 also places restric-

tions on religious practice and retains the LFNC's control of many religious activities. During the period covered by this report, 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.

No churches were closed during the reporting period, but local officials in Savannakhet Province dismantled one church and seized property belonging to a local Christian congregation. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were 13 known religious prisoners, all Protestants, and an additional 11 Protestants under arrest on other charges, but apparently singled out at least in part for their religious affiliation. Of these 24 prisoners, 21 were from the same ethnic Brou community. They were under loose detention in Savannakhet Province.

There were generally amicable relations among the various religious groups; however, officials have reported that tensions over religious practice occasionally occurred in some villages, often resulting from conflicts over use of village resources or from proselytizing. Since many adherents of minority religions are ethnic minorities, conflicts between ethnic groups also have contributed to religious tensions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives discussed the need for greater religious freedom at senior as well as at working levels of the Government and the LPRP, and remained in frequent contact with religious leaders.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 85,000 square miles, and its estimated population is approximately 5.9 million. Almost all ethnic or "lowland" Lao are followers of Theravada Buddhism; however, lowland Lao probably constitute no more than 40 percent of the country's population. Most non-Lao, members of at least 47 distinct ethnic groups, are practitioners of animism, with beliefs that vary greatly between groups. Animists are also found among Lao Theung (mid-slope dwelling) and Lao Soung (highland) minority tribes. Among lowland Lao, particularly in the countryside, there is both a certain syncretistic practice of, and tolerance for, animist customs. Catholics and Protestants constitute approximately two percent of the population. Other minority religions include the Baha'i Faith, Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, and Confucianism. A very small number of citizens follow no religion.

Theravada Buddhism is by far the most prominent organized religion in the country, with nearly 5,000 temples serving as the focus of religious practice and faith, as well as the center of community life in rural areas. In most lowland Lao villages, religious tradition remains strong in spite of economic and social development; most Buddhist men will still spend some part of their life as a monk in a temple, even if only for a few days. There are approximately 22,000 monks in the country, nearly 9,000 of whom have attained the rank of "senior monk," indicating years of study in a temple. In addition, there are approximately 450 nuns, generally older women who are widowed, resident in temples throughout the country. The Buddhist church is under the direction of a Supreme Patriarch, who resides in Vientiane and supervises the activities of the church's central office, the Ho Thammasapha.

Although officially incorporated into the dominant Mahanikai school of Buddhist practice after 1975, the Thammayudh sect of Buddhism still maintains a following in the country. Abbots and monks of several temples, particularly in Vientiane, reportedly are followers of the Thammayudh school, with its greater emphasis on meditation and discipline.

In Vientiane there are five Mahayana Buddhist pagodas, two serving the Lao-Vietnamese community and three serving the Lao-Chinese community. Buddhist monks from Vietnam, China, and India have visited these pagodas freely to conduct services and to minister to worshippers. There are at least four large Mahayana Buddhist pagodas in other urban centers and smaller Mahayana pagodas in villages near the borders of Vietnam and China. Buddhist nuns reportedly serve some of these pagodas.

The Roman Catholic Church has 30,000 to 40,000 adherents, many of whom are ethnic Vietnamese, concentrated in major urban centers along the Mekong River. The Catholic Church has an established presence in five of the most populous central and southern provinces, where Catholics are able to worship openly. However, the Catholic Church's activities are circumscribed in the north, and a once thriving Catholic community in Luang Prabang province is moribund. There are three bishops, located in Vientiane, Thakhek, and Pakse, who were able to visit Rome to confer with church officials. A fourth bishop, for the northern part of the country,

has been unable to take up his post in Luang Prabang. The church's property there was seized after 1975 and there is no longer a parsonage in that city; the bishop remains in residence in Vientiane. A Catholic seminary in Thakhek is training a small number of priests to serve the Catholic community. In addition, several foreign nuns have served temporarily in the Vientiane diocese.

Approximately 250 to 300 Protestant congregations conducted services throughout the country for a Protestant community that has grown rapidly in the past decade; church officials estimate Protestants number approximately 60,000. The LFNC recognizes two Protestant groups: the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC), which is the umbrella Protestant church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The LFNC strongly encourages all other Protestant groups to become part of the LEC. Most Protestants belong to the LEC. Many Protestants are members of ethnic Mon-Khmer groups; the Protestants also have expanded rapidly in the Hmong and Yao communities. In the urban areas the Protestant church has attracted many lowland Lao followers. Most LEC members are concentrated in Vientiane municipality, in the provinces of Vientiane, Sayaboury, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Bolikhamsai, Savannakhet, Champassak, Attapeu, and in the Saisomboun Special Zone, but smaller congregations are found throughout the country.

The Seventh-day Adventist congregation numbers less than 1,000 followers in Vientiane and in Bokeo Province. The Government has granted permission to four Protestant congregations from the two approved denominations to have church buildings in the Vientiane area. In addition, the LEC maintains properties in Savannakhet and Pakse.

Several LEC properties in Savannakhet and Pakse were seized by the Government after 1975, but were returned to the church in the early 1990s. Two informal churches, one English-speaking and one Korean-speaking, serve Vientiane's foreign Protestant community.

Within the LEC, some congregations seek greater independence and have forged their own connections with Protestant groups abroad. As the LEC has grown, an increased diversity of views has emerged among adherents and pastors, and one or two groups have quietly sought to register with the LFNC as separate denominations. Although in theory the Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice provides a mechanism for new religious denominations to register, in practice the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for purposes of control and observation makes it unlikely that authorities will approve these registration requests. Decree 92 provides no details regarding how new denominations should go about registering, other than to say they must submit a "comprehensive" set of documents to the LFNC. Several denominations that so far have requested registration have done so through petitions to the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department, citing their growing body of followers and doctrinal differences with the established Protestant churches. In theory, denominations that are not registered with the LFNC are not allowed to practice their faith, and denominations that have sought registration have expressed their concerns about being forced to cease their activities should their registration requests be denied. However, so far authorities have made no attempt to interfere in the activities of these "independent" churches.

There are approximately 400 adherents of Islam in the country, the vast majority of whom are foreign permanent residents of Middle Eastern and Cambodian (Cham) origin. There are two active mosques in Vientiane that minister to the Sunni and Shafie branches of Islam.

The Baha'i Faith has more than 1,200 adherents and four centers: two in Vientiane municipality, one in Vientiane province, and one in Savannakhet. Small groups of followers of Confucianism and Taoism practice their beliefs in the larger cities.

Although the Government prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, some resident foreigners associated with private businesses or NGOs quietly engage in missionary activity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the authorities, particularly at the local level, sometimes violate this right in practice. Article 30 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, Article 9 discourages all acts that create divisions among religions and persons. The LPRP and the Government interpret this constitutional provision restrictively and consequently inhibit religious practice by all persons, especially those belonging to minority religions. Although official pronouncements accept the existence of different religions, they emphasize the potential to divide, distract, or destabilize. Many local officials, as well as some sen-

ior officials in the Government and the LPRP, appear to interpret Article 9 as justification to prohibit proselytizing and to discourage religious conversions, especially to Christianity.

The absence of rule of law has created an atmosphere in which authorities may act with impunity against persons regarded as posing a threat to social order. Persons arrested for their religious activities have been charged with exaggerated security or other criminal offenses. Persons detained may be held for lengthy periods without trial. Court judges, not juries, decide guilt or innocence in court cases, and an accused person's defense rights are limited. A person arrested or convicted for religious offenses has little protection under the law. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practice their faith in an atmosphere in which the application of the law is arbitrary. Certain actions interpreted by officials as threatening may bring harsh punishment. Religious practice is "free" only if the practitioners stay within tacitly-understood guidelines of what is acceptable to the Government and the LPRP.

To establish clearer guidelines than those provided by the Constitution and criminal and civil law on the rights and obligations of religious faiths, in July 2002 the Prime Minister's Office issued Prime Minister's Decree 92 on the Administration and Protection of Religious Practice. In 20 articles, Decree 92 establishes guidelines for religious activities in a broad range of areas. While the decree provides that the Government "respects and protects legitimate activities of believers," it also seeks to ensure that religious practice "conforms to the laws and regulations." Decree 92 reserves for the LFNC the "right and duty to manage and promote" religious practice, requiring that nearly all aspects of religious practice receive the approval of the LFNC office at the level where the activity occurs.

Although the rules legitimize many activities that were previously regarded as illegal, such as proselytizing, printing of religious material and maintaining contact with overseas religious groups, the qualification that all such activities must receive LFNC approval effectively gives the Government a tool for imposing restrictions on religious practice.

Both the Constitution and Decree 92 take the view that religious practice should serve national interests, promoting development and education and instructing believers to be good citizens. The Government presumes its right and duty to oversee religious practice at all levels to ensure it fills this role in society. In practice, this has led the Government to intervene frequently in the activities of minority religious groups, particularly Christians, whose practices the authorities felt did not promote national interests or whose activities authorities saw as demonstrating disloyalty to the Government or to the Communist Party.

Although the State is secular in both name and practice, members of the LPRP and governmental institutions pay close attention to Theravada Buddhism, which is practiced by the majority of the ethnic Lao population. The Government's observation, control of clergy, training support, and oversight of temples and other facilities constitute a form of favoritism that in effect gives Theravada Buddhism the status of an unofficial national religion. Many persons regard Buddhism as both an integral part of the national culture and as a way of life. The increasing incorporation of Buddhist ritual and ceremony in State functions reflects the elevated status of Buddhism in society. For example, during its dedication of a monument to a past king in early 2003, the Government enlisted the full support of the Buddhist clergy to consecrate the monument, transforming the dedication of a statue of a secular king into a semi-religious event.

Animists generally experienced no government interference in their religious practices. However, the Government actively discourages animist practices that it regards as outdated, unhealthy, or illegal, such as the practice in some tribes of killing infants born with defects or of keeping the bodies of deceased relatives in homes.

Although the Government does not recognize the Holy See, the Papal Nuncio visits from Thailand and coordinates with the Government on assistance programs, especially for lepers and persons with disabilities.

All persons in the Islamic community appear to be able to practice their faith openly, freely attending the two active mosques. Daily prayers and the weekly Jumaat prayer on Fridays proceed unobstructed, and all Islamic celebrations are allowed. Citizens who are Muslims are able to go on the Hajj. Groups that conduct Tabligh teachings for the faithful come from Thailand once or twice per year. During the period covered by this report, the Government paid closer scrutiny to the activities of the small Muslim population, but did not interfere with the community's religious activities.

The small Seventh-day Adventist Church, confined to a handful of congregations in Vientiane and in Bokeo Province, has reported no government interference in its activities in recent years, and its members appear to be free to practice their faith. Baha'i local spiritual assemblies and the national spiritual assembly routinely hold

Baha'i 19-day feasts and celebrate all holy days. The national spiritual assembly meets regularly and is free to send a delegation to the Universal House of Justice in Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel.

There is no religious instruction in public schools, nor are there any parochial or religiously affiliated schools operating in the country. In practice many boys spend some time in Buddhist temples, where they receive instruction in religion as well as in academics. Temples traditionally have filled the role of schools and continue to play this role in smaller communities where formal education is limited or unavailable. Christian denominations, particularly the LEC, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Catholic Church, operate Sunday Schools for children and young persons.

The Government has only one semireligious holiday, Boun That Luang, which also is a major political and cultural celebration. However, the Government recognizes the popularity and cultural significance of Buddhist festivals, and most senior officials openly attend them. The Government permits major religious festivals of all established congregations without hindrance.

The Government requires and routinely grants permission for formal links with coreligionists in other countries. In practice the line between formal and informal links is blurred, and relations generally are established without much difficulty.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's tolerance of religion varied by region and by religion, with Protestants continuing to be the target of most restrictions. Although not subjected to harassment, the Buddhist hierarchy receives close oversight from the Government. In general, government authorities appeared unable—and in some cases, unwilling—to control or mitigate harsh measures that were taken by some local or provincial authorities against members of minority religious denominations. The LFNC at times did use its offices to mitigate the arbitrary behavior of local officials in some areas where harassment of Christian religious minorities had been most severe. However, in 2003 the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department adopted a policy of becoming involved in local religious controversies only in extreme cases, urging localities to resolve their own problems, using Decree 92 as guide. As a result, the application of Decree 92 was inconsistent, and some areas of the country continued to see improvements in religious tolerance, while other areas saw reverses. In general, larger urban areas, such as Vientiane, Thakhek, Pakse, and Savannakhet Cities, experienced little or no overt religious abuse and reported an improved atmosphere of religious tolerance. Moreover, the large Protestant and Catholic communities of several provinces, including Xieng Khouang, Khammouane, and Champassak, reported no difficulties with authorities. Relations between officials and Christians in these areas were generally amicable. However, even in these areas, religious practice was restrained by official rules and policies that allowed properly registered religious groups to practice their faith only under circumscribed conditions.

Between 1999 and 2001, local authorities closed approximately 20 of Vientiane province's 60 LEC churches, primarily those in Hin Hoep, Feuang, and Vang Vieng districts, and approximately 65 LEC churches in Savannakhet and Luang Prabang provinces. Many of these churches were allowed to reopen in 2002, especially in Vientiane and Luang Prabang provinces; however, the majority of churches in Savannakhet remained closed at the end of the period covered by this report.

An LEC church in Ban Nong Ing, Champhon District of Savannakhet Province, was torn down by local officials in early 2003, its wood used to construct a bicycle parking shed for a nearby school. Also in early 2003, officials in Kengkok Village of Champhon District expelled several LEC families living in a parsonage house on property belonging to the LEC community and forcibly took over the house for use as a village office. In late June, officials in Kengkok agreed in principle to return to the LEC community the LEC church that had been seized by the village in 1999. However, the church had not been returned by the end of the period covered by this report.

As many as 200 of the LEC's nearly 300 congregations, lacking permanent church edifices, conduct worship services in members' homes. Since the promulgation of Decree 92, the LFNC has adopted the view that home services are "improper," and that local congregations should worship in dedicated church buildings. In spite of this policy, village and district-level LFNC offices have not been forthcoming in authorizing the construction of new churches in many cases. However, authorities in most areas have continued to tolerate home churches. The LEC encountered difficulties registering new congregations and receiving permission to establish new places of worship or to repair existing facilities, including facilities in Vientiane. No other minority religious groups encountered such difficulties. In addition, authorities required new denominations to join other religious groups having similar historical

antecedents, despite clear differences between the groups' beliefs. The LFNC strongly encourages all Protestant groups to become a part of the LEC and has not allowed other Protestant churches, other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to operate openly. Nonetheless, there are some practicing Protestant congregations that are not associated with the LEC, many of which openly conduct services with the knowledge of local authorities.

The authorities remained suspicious of patrons of religious communities other than Buddhism, especially Christian groups, in part because these faiths do not share the high degree of direction and incorporation into the government structure that Theravada Buddhism experiences. Some authorities criticized Christianity in particular as a Western or imperialist "import" into the country. Local authorities, probably with the encouragement from some officials in the Government or LPRP, appear to have singled out the LEC as a target of harassment—the majority of church closings, arrest of religious leaders, and forced renunciations of faith have been directed against the LEC. The LEC's rapid growth over the last decade, its contact with religious groups abroad, the active proselytizing on the part of some of its members, and its independence of government control all have contributed to the Government's and the LPRP's suspicion of the church's activities. Some authorities also have chosen to interpret Christian teachings of obedience to God as signifying disloyalty to the Government and Party. The membership of the LEC is made up mostly of members of ethnic Mon-Khmer tribes and Hmong, two groups that historically have resisted central Government control, and this has contributed to the Government's and the LPRP's distrust of the church.

The Government restricted the celebration of major Christian holidays by some congregations. Authorities in remote areas of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet Provinces, and Saisomboune Special Zone required some LEC congregations to travel to other villages for Christmas celebrations during the period covered by this report, and in Champhon and Saybouli Districts of Savannakhet some LEC members attempting to celebrate Christmas were detained by police. In addition, local authorities in several areas on occasion attempted to force Christian communities to adhere to Buddhist practices by working on Sundays or resting on Buddhist holy days. During the reporting period, authorities in the Champhon and Saybouli Districts interfered with LEC congregations' religious practice by forcing church members to attend political training on Sundays. There were no reports of official interference in or denial of permission to hold religious celebrations of other religious groups. There were no reports of security forces stopping vehicles that carried multiple passengers during Sunday worship hours to prevent villagers from traveling to attend worship services.

The Catholic Church has experienced little overt harassment in recent years, but long-standing restrictions on its operations in the north have shut down the once thriving Catholic community in Luang Prabang and have left only a handful of small congregations in Sayaboury, Bokeo, and Luang Namtha. Because the Catholic Church's property in Luang Prabang was seized after the creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, the Church owns no parsonage in that city and the Bishop of Luang Prabang has remained in residence in Vientiane. Authorities continued to restrict the bishop's travel to his diocese. There are no ordained Catholic priests operating in the north. Several church properties, including a school in Vientiane, were seized by the Government after 1975 and have not been returned, nor has the Government provided restitution. In the central and southern parts of the country, Catholic congregations are able to practice their religion freely.

The Government prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, although it permits foreign NGOs with religious affiliations to work in the country. Foreigners caught distributing religious material may be arrested or deported. There is no prohibition against proselytizing by citizens, and Decree 92 specifically authorizes proselytizing, providing the LFNC approves the activity. In spite of this provision, most authorities continue to interpret proselytizing as an illegal activity. Nevertheless, religious followers proselytize, resulting in conversions. Although Decree 92 authorizes the printing of non-Buddhist religious texts and allows religious material to be imported from abroad, it also requires permission for such activities from the LFNC. In practice, the LFNC has not authorized Christian denominations to print their own religious material, including Bibles. Some religious material is brought into the country surreptitiously by believers. On occasion authorities have seized religious material imported from abroad. Persons bringing in religious material face possible arrest. Because of these restrictions, some approved Christian congregations have complained of difficulty obtaining Bibles and religious material.

The Government generally does not interfere with the travel of citizens wishing to go abroad for short-term religious training; however, it requires that such travelers notify authorities of the purpose of their travel and obtain permission in ad-

vance. In practice many persons of all faiths travel abroad informally for religious training without obtaining advance permission or without informing authorities of the purpose of their travel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs usually grants exit visas as a matter of routine. There is no evidence that the Government investigated travelers on their return. However, officials in Champhon District of Savannakhet Province arrested a local LEC member in March on charges the man had traveled to Thailand "without permission." Those charges, although false in that case, indicate that officials in some areas still attempt to restrict citizens' travel abroad for religious purposes.

Until recently, government-issued identity cards reported the religious affiliations of all adult citizens. Newly issued cards do not specify religion, nor is religious denomination specified in family "household registers" or in passports, two other important forms of identification. Officials in Sam Neua City of Houaphanh Province reportedly refused to issue ID cards to some LEC families in Houaphanh Province because of their religion.

Some evidence suggests that the Government makes little effort to ameliorate existing societal discrimination against ethnic minorities when that social tension can be cited as a pretext to restrict religious activities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to arrest persons for their religious activities. Most detentions that occurred during the period covered by this report were of short duration, usually less than 2 months. A number of detainees arrested in 2002 were released at the beginning of the reporting period in Savannakhet, Vientiane, and Luang Namtha Provinces. Three persons arrested and sentenced in Luang Prabang in 1999 for conducting unauthorized religious services were released in July 2002 after completing their sentences. The greatest number of detainees at one time, including those sentenced and those arrested and detained without sentence, was approximately 35 in January, resulting from the mass detention of Christmas worshippers in Savannakhet Province. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were 24 known religious prisoners and detainees, all Christians; 21 of those detainees were reportedly held under loose detention in Savannakhet's Muang Nong District. Conditions in prisons are extremely harsh, and, like other prisoners, religious detainees have suffered as a result of inadequate food rations, lack of medical care, and cramped quarters.

There were several reports that authorities arrested or detained persons, often without charge, because they either held or attended unauthorized religious services. In December 2002, nearly 30 LEC members attending worship services in Savannakhet Province's Champhon and Saybouli Districts were arrested for unauthorized assembly and held for more than a week. In early 2003, several pastors and laypersons were arrested in Vientiane Province for their religious activities. Two persons in Champhon District were arrested in March for their religious faith, although authorities cited "cattle stealing" and "traveling abroad without authorization" as the grounds for the arrests. Four LEC Christians in Luang Prabang Province's Nam Bac District were arrested in April for their religious activities, and authorities in Savannakhet's Muang Nong District detained 21 ethnic Brou Christians in May. Of these, nine were accused of violations of Decree 92; according to Lao authorities, they traveled to another village for a religious ceremony without first obtaining permission. The same authorities report that the remainder were accused of possession of illegal weapons, although other sources maintain that all were detained due to their religious activities. In most of these cases, the detained parties were released following several weeks' detention, usually at district police offices rather than at provincial-level jails, but the group of 21 detainees in Muang Nong remained under loose detention at the end of the reporting period. The following persons were arrested for religious activities and remained in detention without charge at the end of the period covered by this report: Phiasong in Phongsali Province; and Angot, Kanthi, Haban, Dek, Ana, Jan, Ateuy, Apet, Ason, Aneuy, Aje, Saleng, Ajon, Asam, Anyang, Akom, Atuan, Ayet, Akeh, Aleuy, and Yan in Savannakhet Province.

Two persons, Nyoht and Thongchanh in Oudomxai Province, were tried and convicted. They remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April, authorities in Houaphanh Province released from detention a former military officer, Khamtanh Phousy, who had converted to Christianity before his arrest. Although Khamtanh was charged with "anti-government activities," some persons familiar with his case maintain that his arrest was due in part to his religious belief.

There were no reports that authorities detained or deported foreigners for religious reasons.

There were no reports that provincial authorities instructed their officials to monitor and arrest persons who professed belief in Islam or the Baha'i Faith. In most provinces, the preponderance of arrests have been of religious leaders and the most active and visible proselytizers, not of practitioners. However, in Savannakhet Province, practitioners were arrested along with religious leaders in several mass arrests in Saybouli, Champhon and Muang Nong Districts. Despite the end of the formal renunciation campaign, local officials also continued to threaten with arrest congregations and believers. Although officials generally took no action, such threats had a chilling effect on religious practice.

In 2001 an unknown assailant shot and killed prominent LEC Pastor Thongla near his home in Sayaboury Province and injured his daughter. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the killing remained unsolved. In early 2003, unknown assailants fired shots into the home of a prominent LEC pastor in Attapeu province on three consecutive nights, forcing the pastor and his family to flee to a neighboring province temporarily for safety. As of the end of the reporting period, police had made no arrests in that case.

Forced Religious Conversion

Between 1998 and 2001, reports of authorities forcing members of LEC congregations to renounce their religious faith on pain of arrest, denial of educational opportunity for their children, expulsion from their village, or other harsh punishment were commonplace. The similarity of renunciation forms from province to province indicated a concerted effort on the part of the Government or of the Communist Party to decimate the LEC through renunciations. In some areas, whole congregations gave up their faith under this campaign. However, reports of these forced renunciations largely ended by late 2001, and it appears the Government has abandoned systematic efforts to compel Christians to renounce their faith. Church leaders believe that many, if not most, of those who renounced their faith did so as an expedient only, and will rejoin their former churches when conditions improve.

Nevertheless, during the period covered by this report, several instances of forced renunciations by local authorities surfaced, particularly in Savannakhet, Attapeu, Bolikhamsai, and Luang Prabang provinces. In March, in Nong District of Savannakhet Province, three ethnic Brou families, comprised of 16 persons, were expelled from their village for failing to renounce their religious faith. Late in 2002, several ethnic Hmong families in Bolikhamsai's Ban Kata Village were threatened with expulsion from their homes for refusing to renounce their faith; these families reportedly left the village but later were allowed to return. LEC Christians in Attapeu and Houaphanh Provinces and in Kok Ngieu village in Luang Prabang Province also were threatened with expulsion, but officials did not act on these threats when the Christians refused to comply. In the case of threatened expulsions of five Christian families in Attapeu Province, the LFNC's Department of Religious Affairs intervened directly with local officials to ensure the expulsion order was rescinded. In addition, three LEC communities in Saisomboun Special Zone were ordered to abandon their faith by the end of the year or face unspecified punishment.

There were no reports during the period covered by this report of forced renunciations involving profane rituals such as drinking of animal blood, as there had been in the previous reporting period.

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government's record of respect for religious freedom, particularly towards its Christian minorities, was inconsistent during the period covered by this report; most provinces with significant Christian communities showed modest improvements but in some, particularly Savannakhet and Attapeu, abuse of native Christians actually increased relative to the previous reporting period. 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 LEC. The LFNC continued to play a lead role in promoting greater tolerance of the LEC's activities, but with the publication of Decree 92 in July 2002, the LFNC decreased its attempts to intervene directly with localities in most cases where it became aware of local-level abuse. Nevertheless, the LFNC continued its efforts to instruct local officials on religious tolerance. Officials from the LFNC made frequent trips to provinces

that had experienced abuse of Christians in order to instruct local officials on the need to tolerate the activities of Christian congregations. On several occasions, the President of the LFNC, a senior member of the country's ruling Politburo, traveled to the provinces to personally instruct local and provincial officials on the need for greater tolerance of minority religious practice. The LEC also contributed to the improved climate through an aggressive program of public service, providing developmental assistance and organizing social welfare projects in several areas that had previously experienced abuse.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The various religious communities coexist amicably; society places importance on harmonious relations, and the dominant Buddhist faith generally is tolerant of other religious practices. Although there is no ecumenical movement, and there are no efforts to create greater mutual understanding, cultural mores generally instill respect for longstanding, well-known differences in belief. However, interreligious tensions arose on rare occasions within some minority ethnic groups, particularly in response to proselytizing or to disagreements over rights to village resources. Tensions also have arisen over the refusal of some members of minority religious groups to participate in Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador addressed the issue of religious freedom with government leaders at the most senior levels. The Ambassador spoke directly about the state of religious freedom in the country with all the senior leaders, and routinely raised the issue with provincial officials during his frequent provincial visits. The Ambassador has visited several problem areas, including Champhon District of Savannakhet Province, to observe the situation first-hand. Other Embassy officers discussed the issue of religious freedom at the working level with a range of central and provincial officials. The Embassy maintained an ongoing dialog with the Department of Religious Affairs in the LFNC, and as part of this dialog, the Embassy informed the LFNC of specific cases of arrest or harassment, who used this information to intercede with local officials. Embassy representatives met with all of the major religious leaders in the country during the period covered by this report. Embassy officials actively have encouraged religious freedom despite an environment that is restricted by the government-owned and government-controlled media. The Embassy supported and encouraged the February visit of the President of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), a U.S.-based NGO devoted to promoting religious freedom, to survey the status of religious freedom. During this visit, the IGE President traveled to the LEC communities in Savannakhet Province and witnessed local authorities' efforts to conceal the existence of a Christian community in Keng Kok village. The Embassy also hosted the visit of a member of the U.S. Congress and a delegation from the Jubilee Campaign to observe conditions of religious tolerance in the country. The Embassy actively encourages such high-level visits as the most effective tool available for eliciting greater respect for religious freedom from the Government.

MALAYSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some restrictions on this right. Although Islam is the official religion, the practice of Islamic beliefs other than Sunni Islam is restricted significantly.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Religious minorities generally worship freely, although with some restrictions. The Government enforces some restrictions on the establishment of non-Muslim places of worship and on the activities of political opponents in mosques.

The generally amicable relationship among believers in various religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 127,000 square miles and a population of approximately 23 million. According to government census figures, in 2000

approximately 60.4 percent of the population were Muslim; 19.2 percent practiced Buddhism; 9.1 percent Christianity; 6.3 percent Hinduism; and 2.6 percent Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions. The remainder was accounted for by other faiths, including animism, Sikhism, and the Baha'i Faith.

Non-Muslims are concentrated in East Malaysia, major urban centers, and other areas.

In April 2002 and March 2003, the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) initiated an interfaith dialog aimed at promoting better understanding and respect among the country's religious groups. Participants included representatives from the Malaysian Islamic Development Department, the Malaysian Ulama Association, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, Islam is the official religion, and the practice of Islamic beliefs other than Sunni Islam is restricted significantly. In September 2001, the Prime Minister declared that the country was an Islamic state (negara Islam). Government funds support an Islamic religious establishment (the Government also grants limited funds to non-Islamic religious communities), and it is official policy to "infuse Islamic values" into the administration of the country. The Government imposes Islamic religious law on Muslims only in some matters and does not impose Islamic law beyond the Muslim community. Adherence to Islam is considered intrinsic to Malay ethnic identity, and therefore Islamic religious laws bind ethnic Malays.

Religious organizations may register with the Registrar of Societies or with one of the constituent bodies of the MCCBCHS. Registration enables organizations to receive government grants and other benefits. Unregistered houses of worship may be demolished.

In 2001 the Government decided not to approve the Falun Gong Preparatory Committee's application to register as a legal organization. However, the Government has not prevented Falun Gong members from carrying out their activities in public.

For Muslim children, religious education according to a government-approved curriculum is compulsory in public schools. There are no restrictions on home instruction. In November 2002, the Government suspended an annual grant to 260 privately-run Muslim religious schools on grounds that the students were being instructed to oppose the Government.

In June 2002, the Government implemented a rule requiring all Muslim civil servants to attend religious classes taught by government-approved teachers.

Several religious holidays are recognized as official holidays, including Hari Raya Puasa (Muslim), Hari Raya Qurban (Muslim), the Prophet's birthday (Muslim), Wesak Day (Buddhist), Deepavali (Hindu), Christmas (Christian), and, in Sabah and Sarawak, Good Friday (Christian).

In August 2002, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia urged the Government to set up interreligious councils at national and state levels to promote interreligious understanding among citizens of all faiths. No such council had been created by the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Muslims who wish to convert from Islam face severe obstacles. For Muslims, particularly ethnic Malays, the right to leave the Islamic faith and adhere to another religion is a controversial question, and in practice it is very difficult for Muslims to change religions legally. The legal process of conversion is unclear. In 2001 a High Court judge rejected the application of a woman who argued that she had converted to Christianity and requested that the term "Islam" be removed from her identity card. The judge ruled that an ethnic Malay is defined by the Constitution as "a person who professes the religion of Islam." The judge also reaffirmed a 1999 High Court ruling that secular courts have no jurisdiction to hear applications by Muslims to change religions and stated that only an Islamic court has jurisdiction to rule on the woman's supposed renunciation of Islam and conversion to Christianity. In August 2002, the Court of Appeals ruled that only the Islamic court is qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate. These rulings make conversion of Muslims nearly impossible in practice.

The issue of Muslim apostasy is very sensitive. In 1998 after a controversial incident of attempted conversion, the Government stated that apostates (Muslims who wish to leave or have left Islam for another religion) would not face government punishment as long as they did not defame Islam after their conversion. Leaders

of the opposition Islamic Party have stated that the penalty for apostasy should be death.

The Government opposes what it considers deviant interpretations of Islam, maintaining that the "deviant" groups' extreme views endanger national security. In the past, the Government imposed restrictions on certain Islamic groups, primarily the small number of Shi'a residents. The Government continues to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority.

The Government continues to significantly expand 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. The Government justified such measures as necessary to oppose the "politicization of religion" by the opposition. In recent years, government officials and ruling party politicians have claimed that opposition Islamic party members were giving political sermons in mosques around the country.

Proselytizing of Muslims by members of other religions is strictly prohibited, although proselytizing of non-Muslims faces no obstacles. The Government discourages—and in practical terms forbids—the circulation in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible and distribution of Christian tapes and printed materials in Malay. However, Malay-language Christian materials are available. Some states have laws that prohibit the use of Malay-language religious terms by Christians, but the authorities do not enforce them actively. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials faces few restrictions in East Malaysia. In April the Government banned a Bible, written in the mother tongue of the indigenous Iban tribe in the East Malaysia state of Sarawak, on the grounds that the use of the phrase "Allah Taala" (Almighty God), a term widely used in Islamic literature, could create confusion among Muslims. However, by the end of April, the Acting Prime Minister lifted the ban following the addition of a cross to the cover of the Iban Bible, indicating to Muslims that the Bible is intended for Christians.

In recent years, visas for foreign clergy no longer have been restricted, and most visas were approved during the period covered by this report. While representatives of non-Muslim groups are no longer invited to sit on the immigration committee that approves such visa requests, the MCCBCHS is asked for its recommendation. Some non-Islamic groups complained that Christian proselytizing campaigns sometimes were conducted in unethical ways and tended to result in heightened religious animosity within the communities in which they took place.

The Government generally restricts remarks or publications that might incite racial or religious disharmony. This includes some statements and publications critical of particular religions, especially Islam. The Government also restricts the content of sermons at mosques. Some state governments ban certain Muslim clergymen from delivering sermons.

The Government generally respects non-Muslims' right of worship; however, state governments carefully control the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries. Approvals for such permits sometimes are granted very slowly. Beginning in 2000, the Government stopped enforcing guidelines requiring the presence of at least 2,000 adherents of a particular non-Muslim faith in a locality for construction of a new non-Muslim place of worship to be approved. However, resistance from local authorities continues, as no such requirement exists for Muslim places of worship. In addition, after years of complaints by non-Islamic religious organizations about the need for the State Islamic Council in each state to approve construction of non-Islamic religious institutions, the Minister of Housing and Local Government announced that such approval no longer would be required. However, it is not known whether this change always is reflected in state policies and local decisions. For example, in Shah Alam, for several years the Selangor state authorities have blocked the construction of a Catholic Church.

In family and religious matters, all Muslims are subject to Shari'a law. According to some women's rights activists, women are subject to discriminatory interpretations of Shari'a law and inconsistent application of the law from state to state.

In February 2002, the pro-opposition Council of Ulamas submitted a memorandum to the Conference of Rulers urging action against six academics who had allegedly belittled the Prophet Mohammed and humiliated Islam in their writings. The Council of Rulers referred the memorandum to the National Council on Islamic Religious Affairs. No action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

State governments in Kelantan and Terengganu, which are controlled by the Islamic opposition party, made efforts to restrict Muslim women's dress. In Kelantan,

a total of 120 Muslim women were fined between January and May 2002 for not adhering to the dress code. The Terengganu state government introduced a dress code in 2000 for government employees and workers on business premises. Terengganu's executive counselor in charge of women's and non-Muslims' affairs claimed that the dress code was designed to protect the image of Muslim women and to promote Islam as a way of life. One Muslim women's nongovernmental organization (NGO) criticized the requirement, stating that forced compliance with a state-mandated dress code is not consistent with the values of the Koran. According to an unconfirmed report, Muslim women previously had been fired in Kelantan for not wearing a head covering.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continues to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority, and the Government can detain members of what it considers Islamic "deviant sects," i.e., groups that do not follow the official Sunni teachings, without trial or charge under the Internal Security Act (ISA). According to the Government, no individuals were detained under the ISA for religious reasons as of the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government is concerned that "deviationist" teachings could lead people astray and cause divisions among Muslims. Therefore, members of such groups can be arrested and detained, with the consent of the Shari'a (Islamic) court, in order to be "rehabilitated" and returned to the "true path of Islam." In May 2002, the Government revealed that the Malaysian Islamic Development Department has been able to "rehabilitate" hundreds of followers from 125 "deviationist" groups after they underwent "counseling" at a faith rehabilitation center in the state of Negeri Sembilan.

In 2000 the Shari'a High Court in the state of Kelantan, which is controlled by the Islamic opposition party, sentenced four persons to 3 years in prison for disregarding a lower court order to recant their alleged heretical beliefs and "return to the true teachings of Islam." The High Court rejected their argument that Shari'a law has no jurisdiction over them because they had ceased to be Muslims. Dismissing their appeal, the Court of Appeal ruled in August 2002 that only the Shari'a court is qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The Government has a comprehensive system of preferences in the administration of housing, education, business, and other areas for ethnic Malay Muslims and a few other indigenous groups that practice various religions.

Ecumenical and interfaith organizations of the non-Muslim religions exist and include the MCCBCHS, the Malaysian Council of Churches, and the Christian Federation of Malaysia. Muslim organizations generally do not participate in ecumenical bodies. In May representatives from Muslim NGOs boycotted a workshop titled "Toward the Creation of an Inter-religious Council," organized by the Malaysian Bar Council, on grounds that such a council would have powers to endorse apostasy and could also pave the way for other religions to spread their teachings among Muslims. During an international HIV/AIDS conference, also in May, a significant minority of Muslim participants, both local and international, accused a foreign, female Muslim academician of blasphemy and demonizing Islam for presenting a paper that reportedly stated a traditional Islamic theological approach could never cure the disease.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy representatives met and maintained an active dialog with leaders and representatives of various religious groups. The Embassy also sponsored several major events to discuss these issues. One such seminar on "Islam and Human Rights," held in a state controlled by the Islamic opposition party, underscored the connection of human rights with indigenous values and highlighted the key human rights values all share. Another conference on "Religious Pluralism in a Democratic Society" focused

on the role of different religions, including Islam, in a changing American landscape and the shared challenges of multi-religious countries.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total area is approximately 67 square miles, and the estimated population in 2002 was 56,630. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (formerly Congregational), with 54.8 percent of the population; the Assembly of God, with 25.8 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church, with 8.4 percent. Also represented are Bukot Nan Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), with 2.8 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with 2.1 percent; Seventh-day Adventists with 0.9 percent; Full Gospel, with 0.7 percent; and the Baha'i Faith, with 0.6 percent. Persons without any religious affiliation account for 1.5 percent of the population, and another 1.4 percent belong to religions or religious groups not named in the 1999 census, but which local religious leaders believe to consist of Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Salvation Army.

There are foreign missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventists, the Baptist Church, and other groups. Only Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize through door-to-door home visits. Religious schools are operated by the Catholic Church, the United Church of Christ, the Assembly of God, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Baptist Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. Missionary groups are allowed to operate freely.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there ramifications for not registering.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Although Christianity is a dominant social and cultural force, there are amicable relations between the country's religious denominations. Nonbelievers, who constitute a very small percentage of the residents, do not suffer discrimination. Typically governmental and social functions begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister, cleric, or church official.

In the early 1990s, the Government under President Amata Kabua mandated the establishment of a national council of churches. The council, which includes representatives of all faiths, still exists in name, but largely has been inactive.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total area is approximately 260 square miles, and its population is approximately 107,000 according to the 2000 census. Most Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present on the four states of the country. The most prevalent Protestant denomination is the United Church of Christ. Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, Assembly of God, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and adherents of the Baha'i Faith also are represented. On the island of Kosrae, 99 percent of the population are members of the United Church of Christ; on Pohnpei, the population is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics; on Chuuk and Yap, approximately 60 percent are Catholic and 40 percent are Protestant. There is a small group of Buddhists on Pohnpei.

Most immigrants are Filipino Catholics who join local Catholic churches.

On the island of Pohnpei, clan divisions mark religious boundaries in some measure. More Protestants live on the Western side of the island, while more Catholics live on the Eastern side.

Missionaries of many faiths work within the country, including Seventh-day Adventists and Mormons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Bill of Rights forbids establishment of a state religion and governmental restrictions on freedom of religion. There is no state religion.

Foreign missionary groups operate without hindrance in all four states.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Representa-

tives of the Embassy regularly meet with the leaders of religious communities in the country.

MONGOLIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the law limits proselytizing, and some groups that seek to register face bureaucratic harassment.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 580,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.4 million. Buddhism and the country's traditions are tied closely, and it appears likely that almost all ethnic Mongolians (93 percent of the population) practice some form of Buddhism. Lamaist Buddhism of the Tibetan variety is the traditional and dominant religion.

Since the end of Socialist controls on religion and the country's traditions in 1990, active interest in Buddhism and its practice have grown. The Buddhist community is not completely homogeneous, and there are several competing schools, including a small group that believes that the sutras (books containing religious teachings) should be in the Mongolian language and that all members of the religious clergy should be citizens.

Kazakhs, most of whom are Muslim, are the largest of the ethnic minorities, constituting approximately 4 percent of the population nationwide and 85 percent of the population of the western province, Bayan-Olgiy. Kazakhs operate Islamic schools for their children. They sometimes receive financial assistance from religious organizations in Kazakhstan and Turkey. The Kazahks' status as the majority ethnic group in Bayan-Olgiy was established in the former Socialist period and continues in much the same circumstances.

There is a small number of Christians in the country, including Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and members of some Protestant denominations. There are no nationwide statistics on the number of Christians in the country. The number of citizens who practice Christianity in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, is approximately 24,000, or 0.3 percent of the registered population of the city.

Some citizens practice shamanism, but there are no reliable statistics on their numbers.

Foreign missionary groups include Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, various evangelical Protestant groups, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and adherents of the Baha'i Faith.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the law limits proselytizing, and some groups that seek to register face bureaucratic harassment. The Constitution explicitly recognizes the separation of church and state. A law regulating the relationship between church and state was passed in 1993 and amended in 1995.

Although there is no state religion, traditionalists believe that Buddhism is the "natural religion" of the country. The Government has contributed to the restoration of several Buddhist sites that are important religious, historical, and cultural centers. The Government does not subsidize the Buddhist religion otherwise.

Religious groups must register with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs. While the Ministry is responsible for registrations, local assemblies have the authority to approve applications at the local level.

Under the law, the Government may supervise and limit the number of places of worship and clergy for organized religions; however, there were no reports that the Government did so during the period covered by this report. The registration process is decentralized with several layers of bureaucracy, in which officials sometimes

demand payments in exchange for authorization. In addition, registration in the capital may not be sufficient if a group intends to work in the countryside where local registration also is necessary. Some groups encountered harassment during the registration process, including demands by midlevel city officials for financial contributions in return for securing legal status. When registration was completed, the same authorities threatened some religious groups with withdrawal of approval. In general, it appears that difficulties in registering primarily are the consequence of bureaucratic action by local officials and attempts to extort financial assistance for projects not funded by the city. Of the approximately 260 temples and churches founded since 1990, approximately 239 are registered, including 151 Buddhist, 74 Christian, 5 Baha'i, 4 Muslim, 2 Catholic churches, and other organizations. Two new Christian churches were registered in Ulaanbaatar in 2002. Contacts with coreligionists outside the country are allowed.

Churches and religious groups must provide the following documentation when registering with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs: 1) a letter from the city council or other local authority granting approval to conduct religious services, 2) a letter to the Ministry requesting that the church be registered, 3) a brief description of the church or organization, 4) the charter of the church or organization, 5) documentation of the founding of the local church or group, 6) list of church leaders or officers, 7) brief biographic information (CV) on the person conducting religious services, and 8) number of worshippers (if any).

The Ulaanbaatar City Council requires similar documentation (except for the first item) prior to granting approval to conduct religious services.

Religious instruction is not permitted in public schools. There is a school to train Buddhist lamas in Ulaanbaatar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While the law does not prohibit proselytizing, it limits it by forbidding the use of incentives, pressure, or deceptive methods to introduce religion. With the opening of the country following the 1990 democratic changes, religious groups began to arrive to provide humanitarian assistance and open new churches, which resulted in some friction between missionary groups and some citizens. Proselytizing by registered religious groups is allowed, although a Ministry of Education directive bans mixing foreign language or other training with religious teaching or instruction. The Government enforced this law, particularly in the capital area. Churches that violate the law may not receive an extension of their registration. If individuals violate the law, the Government may ask their employers to terminate their employment.

Some missionary groups were still in the process of registering with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs during the period covered by this report. The process is protracted for some groups, but others are registered quickly.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Citizens generally are tolerant of the beliefs of others, and there were no reports of religiously motivated violence; however, there has been some friction between missionary groups and citizens, because in the past humanitarian assistance was accompanied by proselytizing activity. Some conservatives have criticized foreign influences on youth and children, including foreign religions and the use of incentives to attract believers.

There are no significant ecumenical movements or interfaith dialog.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. embassy officials have discussed with authorities specific registration difficulties encountered by Christian churches. These discussions focused attention on U.S. concern for religious freedom and opposition to corruption; the discussions resulted in a clarification of the requirements for registration.

The U.S. Embassy maintains regular contact with Buddhist leaders, as well as with leaders and clergy of Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, and Mormon religious groups. In addition the Embassy has met with representatives of U.S.-based reli-

gious and humanitarian organizations. The Embassy also maintains contact with the staff of the local office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and the U.N. Development Program to discuss human rights and religious freedom.

During the reporting period, the Ambassador called on both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Minister of Justice to highlight the importance the U.S. Government places on religious freedom, with a particular focus on the issue of religious broadcasting.

NAURU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in some circumstances.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government placed some restrictions on the practice of religion by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom are foreign workers employed by the government-owned Nauru Phosphate Corporation (NPC).

There were no indications of general societal discrimination against particular religious denominations; however, economic problems resulting from declining income in the country's important phosphate mining industry have led to some social strains, and there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church (the country's dominant religion) to religions perceived as foreign, in particular to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues, including restrictions on religious freedom, with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 10 square miles, and its population is approximately 10,000. Christianity is the primary religion. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestants, and the remaining one-third are Roman Catholics. The population as a whole is 58 percent Nauruan, 26 percent other Pacific Islanders, 8 percent European, and 8 percent Chinese. Some of the latter group may be Buddhist or Taoist.

Foreign missionaries introduced Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There are a few active Christian missionary organizations, including representatives of the Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic faiths.

Many foreign workers in the country's phosphate industry practice faiths different from those of native-born citizens. Both the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses have won converts among such workers, some of whom hold religious services in their Nauru Phosphate Corporation (NPC) owned housing. Practitioners of "foreign" religions thus are concentrated in the area used by the NPC for workers' housing, known as Location.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in some circumstances. Under the Constitution, the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association may be contravened by any law that "makes provision which is reasonably required . . . in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health." The Government has cited this provision as a basis for preventing foreign churches from proselytizing native-born citizens.

There is no state religion; however, Nauru Protestant Church officials hold influential positions in both the Government and the Nauru Phosphate Corporation.

Officials of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have been informed that, under the provisions of the Birth, Death and Marriage Ordinance, their churches must register with the Government in order to operate in an official capacity (i.e., to build churches, hold church services in the multinational facility owned by the NPC, and otherwise practice freely their religion). The legal counsel for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has asserted that, while the ordinance in question permits the Government to recognize a religious denomination, it only requires such recognition if a denomination's ministers wish to solemnize marriages. The Church reported that it submitted a registration

request in 1999; however, the Government did not respond either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries. As of the end of the period covered by this report, officials of Jehovah's Witnesses had not submitted a request for such registration.

Christmas and Easter are official holidays.

The Government has not taken specific actions to improve interreligious relations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government has prevented officials of both Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from visiting the country in their official capacity and on occasion has prevented them from visiting the country at all. While in the country, these officials have been prevented from practicing openly their religion, and have been discouraged from making contacts with native-born citizens. The Government has cited, as a justification for such restrictions, concern that outside churches might break up families through their proselytizing activity.

On two occasions, the Government detained visiting Mormon officials and confiscated their passports and airline tickets. On the first occasion, in January 2001, an immigration officer informed the church officials as they were attempting to leave the country that they were in violation of the requirement that a citizen sponsor their visit, and that their passports were being taken for photocopying. However, on the second occasion, in May 2002, no such explanation was given; in that instance, church officials had obtained the required sponsorship and visas. Intervention of a senior immigration official was required in both instances before the passports were returned and the officials were allowed to leave the country. In May visiting Mormon officials were allowed to enter and exit the country, in an unofficial capacity, without incident.

There is a multidenominational religious facility for foreign phosphate workers in the area known as Location; however, Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to use this facility for religious services or meetings. Members of both of these religious groups, who are drawn largely from the Filipino, Tuvalan, and I-Kiribati communities, also have been threatened with revocation of their work visas if they hold religious services in their NPC-owned living quarters.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

No evidence exists of general societal discrimination against specific religious denominations; however, economic problems resulting from sharply declining income from the country's phosphate mining industry have led to some social strains, and there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church to religions perceived as foreign, in particular to the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji also is accredited to the Government of Nauru. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Suva, Fiji have discussed religious freedom issues, including restrictions on religious freedom, with representatives of the Government of Nauru in Suva.

The Embassy actively supports efforts to improve and expand governmental and societal awareness of and protection for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion.

NEW ZEALAND

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with a total area of approximately 99,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.0 million. The religious composition of the country is predominantly Christian but diversity continues to increase. According to the 2001 census approximately 55 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian or as affiliated members of individual Christian denominations. Three major Christian denominations—the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches—continued to experience a decline in membership between 1996 and 2001, while the Roman Catholic Church showed a slight increase. Anglicans remain the largest Christian denomination, with 15 percent of the population in 2001. The Maori Christian churches, including Ratana and Ringatu, experienced significant growth rates; Ratana grew by 34 percent and Ringatu grew by 84 percent between 1996 and 2001. After experiencing growth of 55 percent between 1991 and 1996, the number of Pentecostals declined by approximately 19 percent between 1996 and 2001, to less than 1 percent of the population. During the same period, non-Christian religions continued to show strong growth rates, driven primarily by immigration. From a low base, the number of Sikhs increased by 538 percent, and the Rastafarians increased by 122 percent. Other non-Christian groups increased as well: Taoists by 97 percent, Muslims by 73 percent, Hindus by 53 percent, and Buddhists by 47 percent. Hindus and Buddhists each account for approximately 1 percent of the population; other non-Christian religions each account for less than 1 percent. More than 38 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation (26.76 percent), objected to answering questions about religious affiliation (6.23 percent), or declined to state a religious affiliation (5.51 percent).

According to 2001 census data, the following were the numbers and percentages of the population's religious affiliation: No religion—1,028,052 (26.76 percent); Anglican—584,793 (15.22 percent); Roman Catholic—486,015 (12.65 percent); Presbyterian—417,453 (10.87 percent); objected to answering the question—239,241 (6.23 percent); did not state affiliation—211,638 (5.51 percent); Christian (no more specific identification)—192,165 (5 percent); Methodist—117,415 (3.06 percent); Baptist—50,598 (1.32 percent); Ratana (a Maori/Christian group with services in the Maori language)—48,975 (1.27 percent); Buddhist—41,535 (1.08 percent); Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)—39,915 (1.04 percent); and Hindu—38,769 (1.01 percent). In addition, there were more than 90 religious groups represented that each constituted less than 1 percent of the population. The indigenous Maori (approximately 15 percent of the population) tend to be followers of Presbyterianism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian faiths such as Ratana and Ringatu. Maori Christian faiths integrate Christian tenets with precolonial Maori beliefs.

The Auckland statistical area (which accounts for roughly 30 percent of the country's total population) exhibits the greatest religious diversity. Farther south on the North Island, and on the South Island, the percentage of citizens who identified themselves with Christian faiths increased while those affiliated with non-Christian religions decreased.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Education Act of 1964 specifies in its "secular clause" that teaching within public primary schools "shall be entirely of a secular character;" however, it also permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools within certain parameters. If the school committee in consultation with the principal or head teacher so determines, any class may be closed at any time of the school day within specified limits for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors. However, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory. According to the Legal Division of the Ministry of Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of their individual school boards. The Ministry of Education does not keep centralized data on how many individual primary or secondary schools permit religious instruction or observances; however, a curriculum division spokesperson maintains that in practice religious instruction, if it occurs at a particular school, usually is scheduled after normal school hours.

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act of 1975, the Government, in response to a burgeoning general primary school role and financial difficulties experienced by a large group of Catholic parochial schools, permitted the incorporation of private schools into the public school system. Designated as "integrated schools," they were deemed to be of a "unique character" and were permitted to receive public funding provided that they allowed space for nonpreference students (students who do not fit within the "unique character" of the school; for example, non-Catholic students who attend a Catholic school). A total of 303 of the 2,784 primary schools are integrated schools with this designation. More than 250 of these 303 schools are Catholic; there are a handful of non-Christian or non-religious schools, such as Islamic, Hare Krishna, or Rudolph Steiner (a school of spiritual philosophy). Students cannot be required to attend an integrated school; admission to integrated schools is based on the student's request.

Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter are official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, some businesses are fined if they attempt to operate on the official holidays of Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. The small but growing non-Christian communities have called for the Government to take into account the country's increasingly diverse religious makeup and offer greater holiday flexibility. In response, the Government acted to remove some constraints on trade associated with the Christian faith. In 2001 the Government enacted new legislation that permits several types of businesses to remain open on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. While many other businesses are still fined if they attempt to operate on these Christian holidays, Parliament's Commerce Committee is reviewing legislation that would either allow Easter Sunday trading for all retailers, or allow local authorities to use by-laws to permit shops to open on Easter Sunday.

The Government does not require licenses or registration to recognize a religious group. However, if a religious group wishes to collect money for the promotion of religion or other charitable causes, and wishes to be recognized by the Inland Revenue Department, then it must register with the IRD as a charitable trust to obtain tax benefits. There is no fee for this registry.

The Country has two registered Christian political parties. There are no other religiously-affiliated parties, although the law does not prevent the registration of parties based on other religions. In June the Government registered Destiny NZ, a Christian political party based on the membership of Destiny Church.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Amicable relations exist among the various religious communities in society. Incidents of religiously motivated violence are extremely rare. Due to the infrequency of their occurrence and difficulties in clearly establishing such motivations, the police do not attempt to maintain data on crimes that may have been motivated by religion.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Mission regularly includes representatives from a wide range of religious faiths at its sponsored events. The U.S. Embassy also maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities.

PALAU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the Western Pacific Ocean, the country has a total land area of 188 square miles and a population of approximately 19,000 persons; 70 percent live in the temporary capital, Koror. There are 19 Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religion, and approximately 65 percent of the population are members. Other religions with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church (approximately 2,000 members), the Seventh-day Adventists (approximately 1,000 members), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (approximately 300 members), and Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 70 members). Modekngei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has about 800 adherents. There also is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims in the country and a primarily Catholic Filipino labor force (approximately 3,700 persons). A large percentage of citizens do not practice their faith actively.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early 19th century, foreign missionaries have been active in the country. Some missionaries have been in the country for years and speak the language fluently. A number of groups, including the Baha'i Faith, the Roman Catholic Church, the Chinese Agriculture Mission, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Evangelical Church, the High Adventure Ministries, the Iglesia ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Korean Church, the Korea Presbyterian Church, the Pacific Missionary Aviation, the Palau Assembly of God, and the Seventh-day Adventists, have missionaries in the country on proselytizing or teaching assignments. The Seventh-day Adventist and the Evangelical churches have missionaries teaching in their respective elementary and high schools.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities; however, the Government regulates the establishment of religious organizations by requiring them to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the Government did not deny registration to any group during the period covered by this report. As nonprofit organizations, churches and missions are tax-exempt.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the office of immigration; however, there were no reports that the Government denied these permits to any group during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not require or permit religious instruction in public schools. There is government financial support for religious schools; representatives of any religion may request financial support from the Government to establish a school. The Government also provides small scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national holiday. There is active participation by the majority of the country's religious groups in Easter and Christmas services. Even though the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities—national or state level, public and private graduations, etc.—such activities always are conducted with a prayer to open and close the ceremonies.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, employers have complained to the Division of Labor under the Ministry of Commerce and Trade that the religious practices of Bangladeshi Muslims interfere both with activity in the workplace and with the living arrangements of the employing families. In response in 1998 the Ministry decided to deny work permits to Bangladeshi workers in the future. In July 2001, the Ministry extended this policy to Indians and Sri Lankans. The ban on issuance of new work permits extends to all citizens of the three countries concerned, regardless of religion. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there are no impediments to their practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The various religious organizations are cordial and civil with each other, and the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities in the country.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with a total area of 280,773 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.1 million. According to the 2000 census, the churches with the largest number of members are the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Church, and the Seventh-day Adventists. At that time, 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as members of a Christian church. Minority religions include the Baha'i Faith and Islam; there reportedly are approximately 15,000 Baha'is and 1,000 to 2,000 Muslims in the country. Many citizens combine their Christian faith with some pre-Christian traditional indigenous practices.

The traditional churches proselytized on the island of New Guinea in the 19th century. Colonial governments initially assigned different missions to different geographic areas. Since territory in the country is aligned strongly with language group and ethnicity, this colonial policy led to the identification of certain churches with certain ethnic groups. However, churches of all denominations now are found in all parts of the country. The Muslim community has a mosque in the capital of Port Moresby.

Nontraditional Christian churches and non-Christian religious groups are active throughout the country. According to the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches, both Muslim and Confucian missionaries have become active, and foreign missionary activity in general is high. The Pentecostal Church in particular has found converts within the congregations of the more established churches, and nearly every conceivable movement and faith that proselytizes has representatives in the country. The Summer Institute of Linguistics is an important missionary institution; it translates the New Testament into native languages.

The Roman Catholic Church is the only traditional church that still relies to a large extent on foreign clergy.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this

right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution's provisions for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion consistently have been interpreted to mean that any religion may be practiced or propagated as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. The predominance of Christianity is recognized in the preamble of the Constitution, which refers to "our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours." During the period covered by this report, government officials, including the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, attended rallies held by visiting Christian evangelists.

In general, the Government does not subsidize the practice of religion. The Department of Family and Church Affairs has a nominal policymaking role that largely has been confined to reiterating the Government's respect for church autonomy.

Most of the country's schools and many of its health services were built and continue to be run by the churches, and the Government provides support for those institutions. At independence the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel with which to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operations on a per pupil or per patient basis. The Government also pays the salaries of national teachers and health staff. Although the education and health infrastructures continue to rely heavily on church-run institutions, some schools and clinics have closed periodically because they did not receive the promised government support. These problems are due in part to endemic financial management problems in the Government.

Immigrants and noncitizens are free to practice their religion, and foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytize and engage in other missionary activities.

It is the policy of the Department of Education to set aside 1 hour per week for religious instruction in the public schools. Church representatives teach the lessons, and the students attend the class that is operated by the church of their parents' choice. Children whose parents do not wish them to attend the classes are excused.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

As new missionary movements proliferate, representatives of some established churches and some individuals have questioned publicly whether such activity is desirable. Some persons have proposed legislation to limit such activity. However, the courts and government practice have upheld the constitutional right to freedom of speech, thought, and belief, and no legislation to curb those rights has been adopted. For example, when the Muslim community applied to the Land Board for permission to acquire property on which to build a mosque, some churches objected, citing the country's historical character as a Christian country. Nevertheless permission to acquire the land was granted. After the mosque was built, the press continued to report on the public debate over whether Islam was a threat to the country. Most denominations, including the Catholic Bishops Conference, supported the establishment of the mosque. During the fall of 2001, the public debate on Islam reopened; however, following public statements of support from the Catholic Church and other religious authorities emphasizing tolerance, the issue again was resolved in favor of continuing to allow Muslims to practice their religion freely.

The Council of Churches makes the only known effort at interfaith dialog. The Council members consist of the Anglican, Gutnius and Union Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, and United churches, and the Salvation Army. In addition, 15 parareligious organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association, participate in its activities; however, the self-financing Council only has Christian affiliates. The ecumenical work of the Council of Churches is confined primarily to cooperation among churches on social welfare projects.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Ambassador continued discussions with the Council of Churches and individual church leaders throughout the period covered by this report. The Ambassador and the Embassy's consular officer meet regularly with U.S. citizen missionaries of all denominations.

PHILIPPINES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Adherents of all faiths are free to exercise their religious beliefs in all parts of the country without government interference or restriction. However, socioeconomic disparity between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority has contributed to persistent conflict in certain provinces. The principal remaining armed insurgent Muslim group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), continued to seek greater autonomy or an independent Islamic state. More incidents of violence on Mindanao occurred due to battles between the Government and MILF forces. Representatives from the Government and MILF met several times in early 2003 to prepare for the resumption of formal peace negotiations. As of the end of the reporting period, formal negotiations had not resumed.

There is some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against Muslims by Christians. This has led some Muslims to seek a degree of political autonomy for Muslims in the southwestern part of the country. The once-largest Muslim insurgent group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), reached a peace accord with the Government in 1996, resulting in a strengthened Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy is actively engaged in the peace process between the Government and MILF and plans to monitor future peace talks.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 118,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 80 million. Over 81 percent of citizens claim membership in the Roman Catholic Church, according to the most recent available official census data on religious preference (2000). Other Christian denominations together comprise approximately 8.9 million, or 11.6 percent of the population. Muslims total 5 percent of the population and Buddhists 0.08 percent. Indigenous and other religious traditions comprise 1.7 percent of the population of those surveyed. Atheists and persons who did not designate a religious preference account for 0.5 percent of the population.

Some Muslim scholars argue that census takers in 2000 seriously undercounted the number of Muslims because of security concerns in western Mindanao, where Muslims are a majority, preventing them from conducting accurate counts outside urban areas. The 2000 census placed the number of Muslims at 3.9 million, or approximately 5 percent of the population, while some Muslim groups claim that Muslims comprise anywhere from 8 to 12 percent of the population. Muslims reside principally in Mindanao and nearby islands and are the largest single minority religious group.

There is no available data on "nominal" members of religious organizations. Estimates of nominal members of the largest group, Roman Catholics, range from 60 to 65 percent of the total population. These estimates are based on regular church attendance. El Shaddai, a local charismatic lay movement affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, has grown rapidly in the last decade and has a reported 8 million members worldwide. El Shaddai's headquarters in Manila claims a domestic membership of 6 million, or 7.5 percent of the population, although this cannot be accurately corroborated.

Most Muslims belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. A very small number of Shi'a believers live in the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur in Mindanao. Approximately 20.4 percent of the population of Mindanao is Muslim, according to the 2000 census. Members of the Muslim community are concentrated in

five provinces of western Mindanao, the only provinces in which they represent the majority: Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Large Muslim communities are also located in nearby Mindanao provinces, including Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Norte, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, and North Cotabato. Sizable Muslim neighborhoods can also be found in metropolitan Manila on the northern island of Luzon, and on the large western island of Palawan.

Among the numerous Protestant and other Christian denominations are Seventh-day Adventists, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Assemblies of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Philippine (Southern) Baptist denominations. In addition, there are three churches established by local religious leaders: The Independent Church of the Philippines or "Aglipayan," the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ), and the Ang Dating Daan (an offshoot of Iglesia ni Cristo). A majority of the country's indigenous peoples, estimated between 12 and 16 million, reportedly are Christians. However, many indigenous groups mix elements of their native religions with Christian beliefs and practices.

Christian missionaries work actively throughout the country, including most parts of western Mindanao, often within Muslim communities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Although Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, is the dominant religion, there is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for the separation of church and state. The Government does not restrict adherents of other religions from practicing their faith.

The law requires organized religions to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) in order to establish their tax-exempt status. For SEC registration, religious groups must submit their articles of faith and existing by-laws. The law does not specify penalties for failure to register with the SEC. To be registered as a non-stock, non-profit organization, they must meet the basic requirements for corporate registration and must request tax exemption from the BIR law division. Older religious corporations are required to submit a 5-year financial statement, while new groups are given a 3-year provisional tax exemption. Established non-stock, non-profit organizations may be fined for late filing of registration with the BIR and non-submission of registration datasheets and financial statements. There were no reports of discrimination in the registration system during the period covered by this report.

The Government provides no direct subsidies to institutions for religious purposes, including the extensive school systems maintained by religious orders and church groups. The Office on Muslim Affairs (OMA), an agency under the Office of the President, generally limits its activities to fostering Islamic religious practices, although it also has the authority to coordinate projects for economic growth in predominantly Muslim areas. The OMA's Philippine Pilgrimage Authority helps coordinate the travel of religious pilgrims to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, by coordinating bus service to and from airports, hotel reservations, and guides. The Presidential Assistant for Muslim Affairs helps coordinate relations with countries that have large Islamic populations and that have contributed to Mindanao's economic development and to the peace process.

The ARMM, established in 1990, responded to Muslim demands for local autonomy in areas where they represent a majority or a substantial minority. In 1996, the Government signed a final peace agreement with the MNLF, concluding an often violent struggle that lasted more than 20 years. In August 2001, a plebiscite expanded the ARMM region, which covers Marawi City and Basilan Province, as well as the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Tawi-Tawi, and Sulu.

The Government is working with MNLF leaders on a variety of development programs to reintegrate former MNLF fighters through jobs and business opportunities. The integration of ex-MNLF fighters into the armed forces and police has helped significantly to reduce suspicion between Christians and Muslims.

Peace negotiations between the Government and the separatist MILF continued during the period covered by this report. In June 2001, the Government and the MILF signed an "Agreement on Peace" in Tripoli, including an agreement to implement a cease-fire. However, intermittent clashes continued. In May 2002, the Government and the MILF signed another agreement outlining guidelines on the humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development aspects of the 2001 Tripoli Agreement on Peace.

In March the Government and the MILF peace panels resumed exploratory talks in Malaysia after a long hiatus, and the sides reached agreement on a "cessation of hostilities." However, as of the end of the reporting period, formal peace negotiations had not resumed.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools with the written consent of parents, provided there is no cost to the Government. Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools make available to church groups the opportunity to teach moral values during school hours. Attendance is not mandatory, and various churches rotate in sharing classroom space. The Government also allows interested groups to distribute free Bibles in public schools.

By law public schools must ensure that the religious rights of students are protected. Muslim students are allowed to wear their head coverings (hijab), and Muslim girls are not required to wear shorts during physical education classes. In October 2001, the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) announced plans to erect a mosque on campus to provide Muslim cadets a place to worship and to enhance cultural awareness of Islam for all cadets. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the mosque was still in the planning stages and ground had yet to be broken. As of June, 9 of 1,009 PMA cadets were Muslim.

In many parts of Mindanao, Muslim students routinely attend Catholic schools from elementary to university level; however, these students are not required to receive Catholic religious instruction.

About 14 percent of the school population in Mindanao attend Islamic schools. There are 1,569 Islamic schools (madrasahs) across the country. Of these, 53 percent are located in the ARMM. To date, 1,140 madrasahs seeking financial assistance from local and foreign donors are registered with the Office on Muslim Affairs, while only 35 are registered with the Department of Education. This situation is due primarily to the inability of the madrasahs to meet the Department of Education's accreditation standards for curricula and adequate facilities.

In March President Arroyo called for the integration of the madrasahs into the country's national education system. During the 2002–2003 school year, the Government began to implement a program called Education for Peace and Progress in Mindanao, the goal of which is to integrate madrasahs into the country's national education system and "to foster religious understanding between the country's Muslim minority and the Christian majority." The five-point program agenda includes information and communications technology, madrasah education, peace education, Mindanao culture and history, and teachers training. The program initially involved madrasahs in the ARMM, with the intention of eventually expanding to all Mindanao provinces. Some critics have stated that the government program violates the prohibition against state-funded promotion of religion.

Some high-level government officials have claimed that a number of madrasahs in Mindanao were teaching extremism and inciting young persons to take up arms for their faith and noted that these madrasahs were functioning without the Department of Education's supervision. Some Muslim leaders denied the allegations and, in response, accelerated efforts to integrate madrasahs into the national education system. In June the ARMM's Bureau of Madaris (Madrasahs), an agency under the oversight of the national Department of Education, submitted an integrated curriculum, for both public and private madrasah schools, to the Department of Education. The curriculum incorporates the teaching of the Arabic language and new courses on Islamic values. ARMM officials also called for a new national Bureau of Arabic Language to serve as a coordinating body in the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic values to primary and secondary madrasah schools.

The Government has declared the Catholic holy days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, All Saints Day, and Christmas Day as official holidays. In November 2002, President Arroyo signed into law a bill declaring the last day of Ramadan, or Eid al-Fitr, a national holiday, the first time the Government has made an Islamic holy day a national holiday. The law also established Eid al-Adha, which celebrates the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, as a holiday in the five provinces that comprise the ARMM. This declaration prompted a positive reaction from the Muslim community. A Senate bill introduced in May 2002 proposed the establishment of Eid al-Adha as a national holiday, but the bill had not yet passed as of the end of the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Muslims, who are concentrated in many of the most impoverished provinces in the country, complain that the Government has not made sufficient efforts to promote economic development. Some Muslim religious leaders assert further that Muslims suffer from economic discrimination by the Government, which is reflected in the Government's failure to provide funding to stimulate Mindanao's economic develop-

ment. In April President Arroyo announced a new government initiative to improve conditions in Mindanao, the Mindanao Natin ("Our Mindanao") Initiative. Leaders in both Christian and Muslim communities contend that economic disparities and ethnic tensions, more than religious differences, are at the root of the modern separatist movement.

Intermittent government efforts to better integrate Muslims into the political and economic mainstream have achieved limited success. Many Muslims claim that they continue to be underrepresented in senior civilian and military positions, and cite the lack of proportional Muslim representation in national government institutions. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were one Muslim cabinet secretary and one Muslim senior presidential advisor, but no Muslim senators or Supreme Court justices. Muslims held 9 seats in the 218-member House of Representatives. In March President Arroyo appointed a Muslim jurist to the Court of Appeals, the second highest court in the country.

The Code of Muslim Personal Laws recognizes the Shari'a (Islamic law) civil law system as part of national law; however, it does not apply in criminal matters, and it applies only to Muslims. Some Muslim community leaders (ulamas) argue that the Government should allow Islamic courts to extend their jurisdiction to criminal law cases, and some support the MILF's goal of forming an autonomous region governed in accordance with Islamic law. At the end of the reporting period, there were 17 Shari'a Circuit Court judges and no incumbent judge for the Shari'a District Court. As in other parts of the judicial system, the Shari'a courts suffer from a large number of unfilled positions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In January former ARMM Governor Nur Misuari, who faces trial for allegedly leading a rebellion in Jolo, Sulu, in November 2001, called for the reinvestigation of his case. The Department of Justice (DOJ) denied his appeal after he failed to prove that the investigating prosecutors were biased against him. Meanwhile, 120 Misuari rebels reaffirmed their commitment to the 1996 Government-MNLF peace accord and joined the mainstream MNLF.

During the reporting period, reports surfaced that some politicians in Davao Oriental were exploiting anti-Muslim sentiment among Christians to pursue their respective political agendas, as the majority of Christians were supportive of an aggressive military campaign against the MILF. A Muslim youth group based in Lanao del Sur claimed that the Government's "war" against the MILF more broadly aimed to eradicate Muslims from the province.

The terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) claims to seek the immediate establishment of an independent Islamic state in the southwestern region. In fact, the ASG is primarily a loose collection of criminal-terrorist and kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and mainstream Muslim leaders reject its religious affiliation, strongly criticizing its actions as well as those of its offshoots as "un-Islamic." Most Muslims do not favor the establishment of a separate state, and the overwhelming majority rejects terrorism as a means of achieving a satisfactory level of autonomy.

In recent years, a number of Abu Sayyaf victims have been Christians, including several students, teachers, a Roman Catholic priest abducted from an elementary school on Basilan Island in March 2000, and an American missionary couple kidnapped along with 18 others in May 2001. During the reporting period, six Jehovah's Witness missionaries—four women and two men—were taken captive in August 2002 on the island of Jolo. The two men were beheaded 2 days after their abduction. Two of the women escaped their captors in April, and the remaining two were rescued by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in May.

In June 2002, four Indonesian sailors were taken hostage by Abu Sayyaf. One was killed in captivity, but the other three escaped. In June another ASG hostage, a local dive instructor, escaped after 3 years in captivity.

On March 7, a group of Muslim villagers complained of government-sponsored religious abuse when AFP soldiers flagged down their bus bound for Davao City. After demanding to know whether Muslims were aboard, the soldiers allegedly accused some passengers of being members of the MILF disguised as civilians. The soldiers later claimed that checking all passenger buses was a national security measure. Further, they argued, it was logical to ask whether there were Muslims aboard because ASG and MILF members are predominantly Muslim.

Also in March, Lumad (indigenous people of Mindanao) and Moro (Filipino Muslim) farmers in Mindanao complained to a human rights group that government soldiers and paramilitary forces had tortured them on mere suspicion that they were members of the MILF. Government forces allegedly rounded up the farmers, arrested them without warrant, and brought them to an AFP detachment where they were harassed and tortured.

On April 2, bombs exploded in a wharf in Davao City, leaving 16 persons dead and 50 injured. On April 3, other bombs exploded outside three mosques also in Davao City. The media reported that the Davao mosque bombings, which claimed no casualties, were an attempt to fuel animosity between Muslim and Christian residents of the city. The MILF, initially suspected by the Government as responsible for the wharf bombing, denied the allegations and claimed that the attacks were attempts to sabotage the peace talks. The MILF in turn accused the military of responsibility for the mosque bombings; the military denied the allegations. A few days later, MILF separatist rebels reportedly raided the outskirts of Tupi Town in South Cotabato, Mindanao. They seized two Christian farmers, allegedly for failure to pay extortion demands. Moro leaders issued a statement calling for calm, fearing that the mosque attacks would trigger further reprisal from Muslim residents in the area. Roman Catholic bishops also severely criticized the bombings.

On April 3, unidentified gunmen abducted a Muslim village leader, and on April 6, an Arabic teacher was also abducted in Davao del Sur. Six Muslims have been abducted since the Davao wharf explosion, allegedly by members of the Philippine National Police (PNP). The disappearances were reportedly part of a police crackdown on suspected terrorists. As of the end of the reporting period, the victims had not been recovered, and the assailants had not been identified.

On April 16, suspected militiamen from North Cotabato tortured a 14-year-old Muslim boy and killed and disemboweled his 16-year-old cousin on suspicion that they were members of the MILF. Press reports stated that approximately 30 vigilantes posing as government militia seized and hog-tied the younger victim, who reportedly survived mutilation by faking death. Also in April, nine Moro farmers were ambushed and slashed to death. This trademark killing is practiced by the Ilaga, a vigilante group composed of private armies and some settlers in Mindanao, whom the AFP allegedly employed in its campaign against Muslim secessionists during the 1970s. Local government officials and the AFP discounted the alleged revival of the Ilaga and denied involvement in the killings.

During the widely-reported April 24 MILF raid on the Christian-dominated town of Maigo in Lanao del Norte, over 13 civilians reportedly were killed and more than 100 hostages were taken. They were later freed or rescued by government forces. In May Christian villagers raided a small Muslim settlement in a nearby village, which resulted in the death of a 6-year-old girl and the destruction of several houses, in retaliation for the Maigo attacks. After this resurgence of fighting in Mindanao, the Government's chief MILF negotiator resigned from the peace panel in May.

On May 20, the PNP arrested seven Muslims in a district of Manila on suspicion that they were part of a MILF bomb plot in Manila. The Government's "saturation drive," during which 70 persons were initially arrested, was allegedly based on intelligence reports that this area was haven to Manila-based MILF cadres. Several of the detainees appeared to be linked with secessionist movements in Mindanao, but many others were released without charge. MILF representatives criticized the PNP for raiding a Muslim community, claiming that the arrests were a government attempt to cover up the PNP's failure to solve a spate of bombing incidents in the metropolis. PNP officials denied allegations that Muslims had been targeted because of their religion.

In June, as a condition to resuming peace negotiations with the Government, the MILF formally denounced terrorism and declared that it had no links to any international terrorist organizations.

President Arroyo briefly declared a "state of lawlessness" in Basilan in July 2001 and gave the military the power to detain suspected ASG members and supporters for 36 hours without an arrest warrant. Over different periods in early 2002, the military detained 73 Muslim individuals under this authority. As of the end of the period covered by this report, all 73 remained in detention with their cases pending. Some of the detainees reportedly were arrested because they had names similar to those of ASG members. Several human rights groups maintain that the detainees are innocent civilians who have been targeted because they are Muslim.

Forced Religious Conversions

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious affiliation customarily is a function of a person's family, ethnic group, or tribal membership. Historically, Muslims have been alienated socially from the

dominant Christian majority, and some ethnic and cultural discrimination against Muslims has been recorded.

Christian and Muslim communities live in close proximity throughout the central and western Mindanao region, and, in many areas, their relationship is harmonious. However, efforts by the dominant Christian population to resettle in traditionally Muslim areas over the past 60 years have brought resentment from many Muslim residents. Many Muslims view Christian proselytizing as an extension of a historical effort by the Christian majority to deprive Muslims of their homeland and cultural identity as well as of their religion. Christian missionaries work in most parts of western Mindanao, often within Muslim communities. Predominantly Muslim provinces in Mindanao continue to lag behind the rest of the island in almost all aspects of socioeconomic development.

The national culture, with its emphasis on familial, tribal, and regional loyalties, often creates informal barriers whereby access to jobs or resources is provided first to those of one's own family or group. Some employers have a biased expectation that Muslims have lower educational levels. Muslims report that they have difficulty renting rooms in boarding houses or being hired for retail work if they use their real name or wear distinctive Muslim dress. Some Muslims therefore use a Christian pseudonym and do not wear distinctive dress when applying for housing or jobs.

Reports from the Mindanao region highlighted incidents of discrimination against Muslim refugees by Christian evacuees and officials. Muslims were often automatically associated with the MILF separatist movement apparently because of their religion. According to a Muslim relief operations officer in Mindanao, discrimination was notably high in evacuation centers in Munai and Maigo, both in Lanao del Norte.

During the period covered by this report, incidents of Muslim discrimination against Christians also occurred in traditionally Muslim areas, although to a much lesser degree. In March suspected MILF members attacked a Christian town in M'Lang, North Cotabato, killing five persons. On March 25, suspected rebels stopped a Christian truck driver and his helper and killed both men. In the same month, alleged Muslim rebels singled out Christian passengers on a bus based on their inability to speak the local Muslim dialect. Six Christians were killed.

Although Christian-Muslim relations remain strained in some areas and violent outbreaks occurred in Mindanao, relations improved somewhat during the period covered by this report. This improvement was mainly due to the policies of the Arroyo Administration to remain engaged in the peace process, and to such government actions as: Renewed efforts to negotiate with the MILF; the appointment of a Muslim cabinet secretary; the declaration of Eid al-Fitr as a national holiday; and increased government assistance to Muslims making the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. However, the Government's crackdown on the terrorist ASG beginning in July 2001 led to accusations by many human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of ongoing police and military abuses. Muslim leaders also expressed concern over a possible resurgence of anti-Islamic sentiment due to the worsening conflict in Mindanao and an intensified AFP offensive against the MILF.

On April 23, over 400 delegates participated in the First Muslim Summit on Unity, Peace, and Development in Manila. During the Summit, the Speaker of the House of Representatives called for an affirmative action plan to address the root cause of Muslim extremism and improve the lives of Muslims, Lumads, and Christians.

In May leaders of Muslim communities in Manila pledged to support the PNP in combating terrorism. They vowed to report "suspicious" persons seeking refuge in their communities. In addition, Muslim officials in Manila reportedly formed their own task force, Muslim Solidarity Assembly, to assist the Government in its campaign against terrorism.

From May 20 to 22, 120 religious peace advocates participated in a 3-day Muslim-Christian Interfaith Conference in Zamboanga City, Mindanao, sponsored by the Moro-Christian People's Alliance of the Philippines. Conference participants called for the resumption of peace talks and the end of military offensives in Mindanao. They also criticized specific military-led offensives in conflict areas in Mindanao, which resulted in a number of civilian casualties.

The Bishops-Ulama Conference of the Philippines, which meets monthly to deepen mutual doctrinal understanding between Roman Catholic and Muslim leaders in Mindanao, also has actively supported the Mindanao peace process. Those who convened the conference include the Archbishop of Davao, the President of the Ulama League of the Philippines, and the head of the National Council of Churches. This conference seeks to foster exchanges at the local level between parish priests and local Islamic teachers and community leaders. Paralleling the dialog fostered by reli-

gious leaders, the Silsila Foundation in Zamboanga City hosts a regional exchange among Muslim and Christian academics and local leaders meant to reduce bias and promote cooperation. Other active local organizations include the Mindanao State University Peace Institute, the Ranao-Muslim Christian Movement for Dialogue, the Peace Advocates of Zamboanga, the Ateneo Peace Institute, and the Peace Education Center of the Notre Dame University.

On June 12, more than 1,000 Muslims and Christian representatives of communities in Mindanao and some militant groups commemorated Independence Day with a protest rally calling for an end to the Government's military offensive in the conflict-affected provinces of Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, and Misamis Oriental in Mindanao.

Religious dialog and cooperation among the various religious communities generally remain amicable. Many religious leaders are involved in ecumenical activities and also in inter-denominational efforts to alleviate poverty. The Interfaith Group, which is registered as a NGO, includes Roman Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant church representatives joined together in an effort to support the Mindanao peace process through endeavors in communities of former combatants. Besides social and economic support, the Interfaith Group seeks to encourage Mindanao communities to instill their faiths in their children.

The Government's National Ecumenical Consultative Committee (NECCOM) fosters interfaith dialog among the major religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, Islam, Iglesia ni Cristo, the Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan), and Protestant denominations. The Protestant churches are represented in the NECCOM by the National Council of Churches of the Philippines and the Council of Evangelical Churches of the Philippines. Members of the NECCOM meet periodically with the President to discuss social and political issues. On June 11, NECCOM organized a meeting attended by political leaders to discuss the current conflict in Mindanao.

Amicable ties among religious groups are reflected in many non-official organizations. The leadership of human rights groups, trade union confederations, and industry associations typically represent many religious persuasions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officers in Manila meet with representatives of all major faiths to discuss their concerns on a variety of issues. In addition, the U.S. Government actively supports the Government's peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation. The Joint Statement from President Arroyo's May 19 State Visit to Washington noted: "President Bush stated that the United States stands ready to provide diplomatic and financial support to a renewed peace process." The U.S. Government also announced that representatives from the U.S. Institute of Peace would be available to assist the parties in formal negotiations. In early 2003, the U.S. Congress voted to devote $30 million to promoting peace in Mindanao.

The Embassy also maintains active outreach with NGOs. In April the Embassy hosted a meeting of political and opinion leaders from the Muslim community to discuss the past, present, and future U.S. role in Mindanao. The open forum represented a key part of the Embassy's continuing engagement of host country communities outside Manila. In November 2002, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner at his residence during Ramadan.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) budgeted $36 million for grant assistance to Mindanao in 2003, and much of this assistance targets the poorest regions of Muslim Mindanao. USAID operates the Growth with Equity in Mindanao program, which aims to bring about and consolidate peace in Mindanao; accelerate economic growth, specifically in conflict-affected areas; and support conflict resolution mechanisms. The Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Program assists in the re-integration of 25,000 former Muslim combatants and provides development assistance to hundreds of communities in MNLF areas. USAID, together with the Embassy, produced a DVC documentary of this "arms-to-farms" program.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy sent both Muslim and Catholic leaders to the United States on International Visitor Program Grants. Program topics included women in economic development, foreign policy and human rights, leadership development for Muslim women, and the role of religion in the United States. The Philippine International Visitor Alumni Association established its own working group focusing on peace and Muslim-Christian relations. The Em-

bassy provided small-grant assistance to various interfaith dialog initiatives, and promoted similar themes in its speakers program.

SAMOA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country comprises two major islands that have a total area of approximately 1,000 square miles, and the population is approximately 210,000. Most live on the island of Upolu, where the capital, Apia, is located. Nearly 100 percent of the population is Christian. The religious distribution of the population is estimated to be: Congregational Christian Church, 43 percent; Catholic, 21 percent; Methodist, 17 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 10 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 3 percent. There are small congregations of other Christian denominations, as well as members of the Baha'i Faith and adherents of Islam. There are no reports of atheists. This distribution of church members is reflected throughout the population, but individual villages, particularly small ones, may have only one or two of the major churches represented.

Foreign nationals and immigrants practice the same religions as native-born (Western) Samoans. There are no sizable foreign national or immigrant groups, with the exception of U.S. citizens, most of whom are American Samoans.

The major denominations that are present in the country all have missionaries, as does the Bah'ai Faith.

There is little or no correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. Religious groups include citizens of various social and economic strata.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, thought, and conscience and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution provides for the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government observes and enforces these provisions. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private as well as government actors, and laws are applied and enforced in a nondiscriminatory manner. Judicial remedies are accessible and effective.

The preamble to the Constitution acknowledges "an independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions." Nevertheless, although Christianity is favored constitutionally, there is no official or state denomination.

There are no requirements for the recognition of a religious group or for licenses or registration. Missionaries operate freely, either as part of one of the established churches, or by conducting independent revival meetings.

The Constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious indoctrination in schools but gives each denomination or religion the right to establish its own schools; these provisions are adhered to in practice. There are both religious and public schools; the public schools do not have religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Pastoral schools in most villages provide religious instruction following school hours.

Aside from Christmas, there are no religious holidays that are considered national holidays.

The Government takes steps to promote interfaith understanding by rotating ministers from various denominations who assist at government functions. Most government functions include a prayer at the opening.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Although the Constitution grants each person the right to change religion or belief and to worship or teach religion alone or with others, in practice the matai (village chiefs) often choose the religious denomination of the aiga (extended family). In previous years, despite constitutional protections, village councils—in the name of maintaining social harmony within the village—sometimes banished or punished families that did not adhere to the prevailing religious belief in the village. However, civil courts take precedence over village councils, and courts have ordered families readmitted to the village. The 1990 Village Fono Act gives legal recognition to the decisions of the fono (village courts) and provides for limited recourse of appeal to the Lands and Titles Courts and to the Supreme Court. In July 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that the Village Fono Act could not be used to infringe upon villagers' freedom of religion, speech, assembly, or association. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that villages banished persons due to their practicing religion differently from that practiced by the village majority.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

There is strong societal pressure at the village and local level to attend church, participate in church services and activities, and support church leaders and projects financially. In some denominations, such financial contributions often total more than 30 percent of family income. A high percentage of the population attends church weekly.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities.

SINGAPORE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in some circumstances.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government has banned Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Government does not tolerate speech or actions that could affect adversely racial or religious harmony.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 254 square miles, and its total population is approximately 4 million, of whom 3.3 million are citizens or permanent residents. According to an official survey in November 2000 by the Census of Population Office of the Department of Statistics, 85 percent of citizens and permanent residents profess some religious faith or belief. Of this group, 51 percent practice Buddhism, Taoism, ancestor worship, or other faiths traditionally associated with the ethnic Chinese population. Approximately 15 percent of the population are Muslim, approximately 15 percent are Christian, and approximately 4 percent are Hindu. The remainder are adherents of other religions, agnostics, or atheists. Among Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic Chinese, Protestants outnumber Roman Catholics

by slightly more than two to one. There are also small Sikh, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Jain communities.

Approximately 77 percent of the population are ethnic Chinese, approximately 14 percent are ethnic Malay, and approximately 8 percent are ethnic Indian. Virtually all ethnic Malays are Muslim and most ethnic Indians are Hindu. The ethnic Chinese population is divided among Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, or is agnostic or atheist.

Foreign missionaries are active in the country and include Catholics, Mormons, and Baptists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in some circumstances. The Constitution provides that every citizen or person in the country has a constitutional right to profess, practice, or propagate his religious belief so long as such activities do not breach any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality. There is no state religion.

All religious groups are subject to government scrutiny and must be registered legally under the Societies Act. The Government deregistered the Singapore Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 and the Unification Church in 1982, making them unlawful societies.

The Government plays an active but limited role in religious affairs. For example, the Government seeks to ensure that citizens, the great majority of whom live in publicly subsidized housing, have ready access to religious organizations traditionally associated with their ethnic groups by helping religious institutions find space in these public housing complexes. The Government maintains a semi-official relationship with the Muslim community through the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) set up under the Administration of Muslim Law Act. The MUIS advises the Government on concerns of the Muslim community, has some regulatory functions over Muslim religious matters, and oversees a Mosque Building Fund financed by voluntary payroll deductions.

The Constitution acknowledges ethnic Malays as "the indigenous people of Singapore" and charges the Government to support and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examines all pending bills to ensure that they do not disadvantage a particular group. It also reports to the Government on matters affecting any racial or religious community and investigates complaints.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

There is one official holiday for each of the major religions in the country: Hari Raya Haji for Muslims, Christmas for Christians, Deepavali for Hindus, and Vesak Day for Buddhists.

The Government does not promote interfaith understanding directly; however, it sponsors activities to promote interethnic harmony, and, because the primary ethnic minorities each are predominantly of one faith, government programs to promote ethnic harmony have implications for interfaith relations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricts certain religions by application of the Societies Act; it has banned Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. In 1982 the Minister for Home Affairs dissolved the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, also known as the Unification Church. In 1972 the Government deregistered and banned the Singapore Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that its existence was prejudicial to public welfare and order because its members refuse to perform military service (obligatory for all male citizens), salute the flag, or swear oaths of allegiance to the State. At the time, there were approximately 200 Jehovah's Witnesses in Singapore; now there are approximately 2,000. Although the Court of Appeals in 1996 upheld the rights of members of Jehovah's Witnesses to profess, practice, and propagate their religious belief, and the Government does not arrest members merely for being believers, the result of deregistration has been to make public meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses illegal. Since the 1996 ruling, no charges have been brought against persons attending or holding Jehovah's Witness meetings in private homes.

The Government has banned all written materials published by the International Bible Students Association and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, both publishing arms of Jehovah's Witnesses. In practice, this has led to confiscation of Bibles published by the group, although the Bible itself has not been outlawed. A per-

son in possession of banned literature can be fined up to S$2,000 ($1,100) and jailed up to 12 months for a first conviction.

As of June 30, there were 27 Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated in the Armed Forces Detention Barracks because of their refusal to carry out the legal obligation for all male citizens to serve in the Armed Forces. (There were no known conscientious objectors other than members of Jehovah's Witnesses during the period covered by this report.) The initial sentence for failure to comply with the military service requirement is 15 months' imprisonment, to which 24 months are added upon a second refusal. Subsequent failures to perform required annual military reserve duty result in 40-day sentences; a 12-month sentence is usual after four such refusals.

In previous years, public schools suspended some students who were Jehovah's Witnesses, after they declined to sing the national anthem or participate in the flag ceremony. However, since July 2002, no students have been suspended for those reasons. Instead, students who choose not to sing the national anthem were strongly encouraged to stay at home until they were ready to participate. In the preceding year, from January 2001 to June 2002, three students were suspended for not singing the national anthem. In 2000, 12 students were suspended. In April 2001, one public school teacher, also a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, resigned after being threatened with dismissal for refusing to participate in singing the national anthem.

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, which was prompted by actions that the Government perceived as threats to religious harmony, including aggressive and "insensitive" proselytizing and "the mixing of religion and politics," allows the Government to restrain leaders and members of religious groups and institutions from carrying out political activities, "exciting disaffection against" the Government, creating "ill will" between religious groups, or carrying out subversive activities. The act also prohibits judicial review of its enforcement or of any possible denial of rights arising from it.

The Government does not tolerate speech or actions, including ostensibly religious speech or action, which affect racial and religious harmony and sometimes issues restraining orders barring persons from taking part in such activities.

The Presidential Council on Religious Harmony reports to the Minister for Home Affairs on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony that are referred to the Council by the Minister or by Parliament. The Council also considers and makes recommendations to the Minister on restraining orders referred to the Council by the Minister. Such orders are directed at individuals to restrain them from causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility among various religious groups or to restrain them from mixing religion with politics. The orders place individuals on notice that they should not repeat such acts, and advise them that failure to comply would result in prosecution in a court of law.

In October 2000, the Government refused to grant a public entertainment license for a controversial play that depicted marital violence experienced by Indian Muslim women, after the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore strongly objected to the content of the play. The Government rejected the application on the grounds that the play might inflame religious and ethnic passions.

Missionaries, with the exception of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the Unification Church, are permitted to work and to publish and distribute religious texts. However, while the Government does not prohibit evangelical activities, in practice it discourages activities that might upset the balance of intercommunal relations. In the first half of the year, authorities stopped 6 Jehovah's Witnesses from evangelizing, however no literature was seized and they were released without being charged.

On December 31, 2000, police arrested and later charged 15 Falun Gong practitioners for conducting a protest without a permit; only 2 of those arrested were citizens. The 15 persons arrested had participated in an assembly of 60 Falun Gong practitioners who sought to draw attention to the arrest and killing of Falun Gong practitioners in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The group had not sought a permit, asserting that police had not responded to their previous efforts to obtain permits; the authorities stated that these assertions were untrue. In March 2001, seven members of the group were sentenced to 4 weeks in jail for refusing to hand over placards to the police. The other eight, who were charged with assembling without a permit, were fined S$1000 ($540) each. Of the six PRC citizens who were imprisoned, the authorities later cancelled the immigration status of five, including one permanent resident, and required them to leave the country; the remaining PRC citizen already had departed the country.

In October 1999, the Government proposed compulsory education for all children, which prompted concern from the Malay/Muslim community regarding the fate of madrassahs (Islamic religious schools). In response the Government exempted

madrassah students from compulsory attendance in national schools when the legislation was enacted in October 2000. However, madrassahs were given 8 years from the time that the law goes into effect to achieve minimum academic standards or they will no longer be allowed to teach core secular subjects such as science, mathematics, and English. Compulsory education began with the new school term, which started on January 1.

The Women's Charter, enacted in 1961, gives women, among other rights, the right to own property, conduct trade, and receive divorce settlements. Muslim women enjoy most of the rights and protections of the Women's Charter; however, for the most part, Muslim marriage law falls under the administration of the Muslim Law Act, which empowers the Shari'a court to oversee such matters. Those laws allow Muslim men to practice polygyny. Requests to take additional wives may be refused by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which solicits the views of existing wives and reviews financial capability. Of the approximately 4,000 Muslim marriages registered in 2001, only 20 were polygynous.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities briefly detained and questioned a man in 2000 and three others in 2001 for possession of banned religious material; none were charged with an offense.

There is an ongoing debate over the "tudung" (woman's headscarf); the debate is reported widely in the local press. In early 2002, three female Muslim secondary school students were suspended from public schools for continuing to wear the tudung in violation of school uniform requirements. A fourth girl's parents withdrew her from school over the same issue. The girls' parents objected to the suspensions and filed a lawsuit. The lawsuit was later withdrawn. In February 2002, an opposition leader criticized the Government's ban on wearing of tudungs in public schools during a speech at "Speakers' Corner," which occupies a portion of a public park. He continued despite a police warning that the speech violated the venue's restrictions against discussing sensitive ethnic or religious issue in public. In July 2002, he was convicted of violating the Public Entertainment and Meetings Act, and was fined S$3000 ($1700); fines over S$2000 ($1130) automatically bar a person from seeking public office for 5 years.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations among religious communities in society generally are amicable. Virtually all ethnic Malay citizens are Muslim, and ethnic Malays constitute the great majority of the country's Muslim community. Attitudes held by non-Malays regarding the Malay community and by Malays regarding the non-Malay community are based on both ethnicity and religion, which are virtually impossible to separate.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contacts with the various religious communities in the country.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 11,599 square miles, and its population is approximately 450,000. Most citizens are members of Christian churches. The Anglican, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist denominations are represented. Traditional indigenous religious believers, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, account for approximately 5 percent of the population. Other groups, such as the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and indigenous churches that have broken away from traditional Christian churches, account for another 2 percent. There are believed to be members of additional world religions within the foreign community who are free to practice their religion, but they are not known to proselytize or to hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent census figures, there are only 12 Muslims in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Department of Home and Cultural Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterizes this role, on the one hand, as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression; and, on the other hand, maintenance of public order. All religious institutions are required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that registration has been denied to any group.

In general the Government does not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services in the country were built by and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are schools sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Melanesia, the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Upon independence the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operations. The Government also pays the salaries of most teachers and health staff in the national education system.

The public school curriculum includes 30 minutes daily of religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the Christian churches; students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. However, the Government does not subsidize church schools that do not align their curriculums with governmental criteria. There is mutual understanding between the Government and the churches but no formal memorandum of understanding. Although theoretically non-Christian religions can be taught in the schools, there is no such instruction at present.

Christianity was brought to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries by missionaries representing several Western churches: The Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the London Missionary Society (which became the United Church). Some foreign missionaries continue to work in the country. However, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 50 percent indigenous, the clergy of the other traditional churches is nearly entirely indigenous. Traditional church missionaries are represented by religions such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

There are no government-sponsored ecumenical activities. Customarily, government oaths of office are taken on the Bible; however, religious oaths are forbidden by the Constitution and cannot be required.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, are organized through the Solomon Islands Christian Association, which is composed of the five traditional churches of the country. Occasionally individual citizens object to the activities of nontraditional denominations and suggest that they be curtailed. However, society in general is tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

THAILAND

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it does not register new religious groups that have not been accepted into one of the existing religious governing bodies on doctrinal or other grounds. In practice, unregistered religious organizations operate freely, and the Government's policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths has not restricted the activities of unregistered religious groups. The Government officially limits the number of foreign missionaries that may work in the country, although many unregistered missionaries are allowed to live and work freely.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 190,000 square miles and its population is approximately 62.8 million. In a 2000 survey, over 99 percent of the population professed some religious belief or faith. According to the Government's National Statistics Office, approximately 94 percent of the population is Buddhist, and 5 percent is Muslim; however, recent estimates by other government agencies, academics, and religious groups state that approximately 85 to 90 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist, and up to 10 percent of the population is Muslim. Estimates also indicate that Christians constitute approximately 1 to 2 percent of the population. There are small animist, Hindu, Sikh, Taoist, Jewish, and Confucian populations. No official statistics exist as to the numbers of atheists or persons who do not profess a religious faith or belief, but recent surveys indicate that together they make up less than 1 percent of the population.

The dominant religion is Theravada Buddhism. The Buddhist clergy or Sangha consists of two main schools, which are governed by the same ecclesiastical hierarchy. Monks belonging to the older Mahanikaya school far outnumber those of the Dhammayuttika School, an order that grew out of a 19th century reform movement led by King Mongkut (Rama IV).

Islam is the dominant religion in four of the five southernmost provinces, which border Malaysia. Minority Muslim populations also live in 74 of the 76 provinces. The majority of Muslims are ethnic Malay, but the Muslim population encompasses groups of diverse ethnic and national origin, including descendants of immigrants from South Asia, China, Cambodia, and Indonesia. Government agencies did not use consistent figures to describe the size of the Muslim population during the period covered by this report, but most estimates suggest that Muslims constitute between 6 and 10 percent of the population. There are approximately 3,320 mosques in 59 provinces, with the largest number in Pattani province. All but a very small number of these mosques are associated with the Sunni branch of Islam. The remainder, estimated by the Religious Affairs Department (RAD) to be from 1 to 2 percent of the total, are associated with the Shi'a branch of Islam.

According to government statistics, Christians constitute approximately 0.7 percent (438,600) of the population. Almost half of the Christian population lives in Chiang Mai province. The remainder live in the Bangkok area and in the northeastern provinces. Approximately 25 percent of the Christian population is Roman

Catholic. There also are several Protestant denominations. Most Protestant churches belong to one of four umbrella organizations. The oldest of these groupings, the Church of Christ in Thailand, was formed in the mid-1930s. The largest is the Evangelical Foundation of Thailand. Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists are recognized by authorities as separate Protestant denominations and are organized under similar umbrella groups.

There are six tribal groups (chao khao) recognized by the Government, with an estimated population from 500,000 to 600,000 persons, whose members generally are described as animists. Syncretistic practices drawn from Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and ethnic Tai spirit worship are common. The Hindu and Sikh communities have an estimated population of approximately 23,000 persons. Both are associated with small immigrant groups that arrived from South Asia during the 20th century, although Brahman temples had been established in Bangkok as early as 1784. The majority of Hindus and Sikhs live in Chonburi, Bangkok, and Phuket provinces.

The ethnic Chinese minority (Sino-Thai) has retained some popular religious traditions from China, including adherence to popular Taoist beliefs. Members of the Mien hill tribe follow a form of Taoism.

Mahayana Buddhism is practiced primarily by small groups of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. There are more than 650 Chinese and Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist shrines and temples throughout the country.

Citizens proselytize freely. Monks working as Buddhist missionaries (Dhammaduta) have been active since the end of World War II, particularly in border areas among the country's tribal populations. As of May, there were approximately 3,200 Dhammaduta working in the country. In addition, the Government sponsored the international travel of another 904 Buddhist monks sent by their temples to disseminate religious information abroad. Christian and Muslim organizations also reported having small numbers of citizens working as missionaries in the country and abroad.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it restricts the activities of some groups. The Constitution requires that the monarch be a Buddhist. The state religion in effect is Theravada Buddhism; however, it is not designated as such. When the Constitution was being drafted in 1997, the Constitutional Drafting Assembly rejected a proposal to have Theravada Buddhism named the official religion on the grounds that such an action would create social division and be "offensive" to other religious communities in the country.

The Constitution states that discrimination against a person on the grounds of "a difference in religious belief" shall not be permitted. There was no significant pattern of religious discrimination during the period covered by this report. The Government maintained longstanding policies designed to integrate Muslim communities into society through developmental efforts and expanded educational opportunities, as well as policies designed to increase the number of appointments to local and provincial positions where Muslims traditionally have been underrepresented.

The Government plays an active role in religious affairs. The RAD, which is located in the Ministry of Education, registers religious organizations. Under the provisions of the Religious Organizations Act, the RAD recognizes a new religion if a national census shows that it has at least 5,000 adherents, has a uniquely recognizable theology, and is not politically active. In addition, in order to be registered, a religious organization first must be accepted into an officially recognized ecclesiastical group. During the period covered by this report, there were seven such groups, including one for the Buddhist community, one for the Muslim community, one for the Catholic community, and four for Protestant denominations. Government registration confers some benefits, including access to state subsidies, tax-exempt status, and preferential allocation of resident visas for organization officials. However, since 1984 the Government has maintained a policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths. In practice unregistered religious organizations operate freely, and the Government's policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths has not restricted the activities of unregistered religious groups.

The Constitution requires the Government "to patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions." The State subsidizes the activities of the three largest religious communities (Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian). During the period covered by this report, the Government provided approximately $43.3 million (1.79 billion baht) to support religious groups. Included in this amount are funds to support Buddhist and

Muslim institutes of higher education; to fund religious education programs in public and private schools; to provide daily allowances for monks and Muslim clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts; and to subsidize travel and health care for monks and Muslim clerics. This figure also includes an annual budget for the renovation and repair of Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques, the maintenance of historic Buddhist sites, and the daily upkeep of the Central Mosque in Pattani.

During the period covered by this report, the Government also provided approximately $66,000 (3 million baht) to Christian organizations to support social welfare projects. Catholic and Protestant churches can request government support for renovation and repair work but do not receive a regular budget to maintain church buildings nor do they receive government assistance to support their clergy. The Government considers donations made to maintain Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian buildings to be tax-free income; contributions for these purposes also are tax-deductible for private donors.

Religious instruction is required in public schools at both the primary (grades 1 through 6) and secondary (grades 7 through 12) education levels. Students at the primary level are required to take 80 hours of instruction per academic year in religious studies classes. Instruction is limited to Buddhism and Islam. During the period covered by this report, some parts of the country with large Muslim student populations did not have Muslim studies courses. Muslim students in these schools generally were directed to school libraries to participate in Muslim self-study courses.

The Government actively sponsors interfaith dialog in accordance with the Constitution, which requires the State to "promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions." The Government funds regular meetings and public education programs. These programs included the RAD annual interfaith meeting for representatives of all religious groups certified by RAD. The August 2002 meeting in Bangkok drew 500 participants. They also included monthly meetings of the 17-member Subcommittee on Religious Relations, located within the Prime Minister's National Identity Promotion Office (the Subcommittee is composed of one representative from the Buddhist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Hindu, and Sikh communities in addition to civil servants from several government agencies), and a 1 week education program jointly organized by the National Identity Promotion Office and the National Council on Social Welfare. The latter event is held each December in celebration of the King's birthday. Representatives from every religious organization recognized by the RAD are invited to attend seminars associated with the event. The program also targets the general public through films and public displays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

A January 2002 immigration "blacklist" included the names of at least 10 Falun Gong practitioners. The Government gave no reason for its decision to place these names on the list and has refused to release information about the individuals placed on the list. All reportedly are overseas residents who have been arrested in other countries for Falun Gong-related activities.

In February 2001, local Falun Gong members voluntarily decided not to proceed with plans to organize an international meeting in Bangkok, proposed for April 2001. Their decision was in part a response to unofficial indications from the Government that it did not favor such a conference. There were reports that the government of China had exerted significant economic pressure on the Government in connection with this issue.

In April, police raided the Bangkok home of a Swedish citizen and found Falun Gong materials, some critical of China's treatment of Falun Gong practitioners. She was detained by immigration police, her visa was revoked, and she was deported in early June.

The Government does not recognize new religious faiths outside of the seven existing groupings. However, unregistered religious organizations operate freely.

The Government permitted foreign missionary groups to work freely throughout the country, although it also maintained policies that favored proselytizing by its citizens.

The number of foreign missionaries officially registered with the Government is limited to a quota that originally was established by the RAD in 1982. The quota is divided along both religious and denominational lines and is considered sensitive for this reason. The quota system permits 400 Roman Catholic, 623 Protestant Christian, and 10 Islamic missionaries per year to work legally in the country. In addition to these formal quotas, many more missionaries, while not registered formally as missionaries, are able to live and work in the country without government interference. While official registration conferred some benefits, such as longer

terms for visa stays, being unregistered was not a significant barrier to foreign missionary activity during the period covered by this report. Many foreign missionaries entered the country using tourist visas and proselytized or disseminated religious literature without the acknowledgment of the RAD. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were deported or harassed for working without registration, although the activities of Muslim professors and clerics were subjected disproportionately to scrutiny on national security grounds because of continued government concern about the potential resurgence of Muslim separatist activities in the south.

The Constitution provides for, and citizens generally enjoy, a large measure of freedom of speech. However, laws prohibiting speech likely to insult Buddhism remain in place.

National identity cards produced by the Ministry of Interior include an optional designation of the religious affiliation of the holder. Persons who fail or choose not to indicate religious affiliation in their applications can be issued cards without religious information.

Muslim female civil servants are not permitted to wear headscarves when dressed in civil servant uniforms. However, in practice, most female civil servants are permitted by their superiors to wear headscarves if they wish to do so, particularly in the country's southernmost provinces. Muslim female civil servants not required to wear uniforms are allowed to wear headscrarves.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

None of the religious communities led "ecumenical" movements.

Religious groups closely associated with ethnic minorities, such as Muslims, experience some societal economic discrimination; however, such discrimination appears to be linked more to ethnicity than to religion.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

TONGA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to the free practice of religion.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total land area of approximately 277 square miles and its population is 101,405. According to the last official census (1996), membership by percentage of population of major denominations is: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 41 percent; Roman Catholic, 16 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 14 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 12 percent; others, 17 percent. However, both Roman Catholics and the Mormon Church state that between 30 to 40 percent of all citizens are members of their faiths. Members of the Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assembly of God, Anglicans, the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and Hinduism are represented in much smaller numbers. There were no reports of atheists.

Western missionaries, particularly Mormons and other Christian denominations, are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally protects this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the Government for tax purposes but is not required. All religious groups are permitted duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax-exempt status.

Missionaries operate without special restrictions. There are a number of schools operated by Mormons and by the Wesleyan Church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution states that Sunday, the Sabbath day, is to be "kept holy" and that no business can be conducted "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all businesses, regardless of the business owners' religion.

The Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintains policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines state that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." Due to this policy, the TBC does not allow members of the Baha'i Faith to discuss the tenets of their religion, or the founder, Baha'u'llah, by name. Similarly, the TBC does not allow Mormons to discuss their founder, Joseph Smith, or the Book of Mormon by name. This policy applies to all churches. Mormons utilize Radio Tonga for the announcement of church activities and functions. Other faiths also utilize Radio Tonga. Members of the Baha'i Faith utilize a privately owned radio station for program activities and the announcement of functions. A government-owned newspaper occasionally carries news articles about Baha'i activities or events, as well as about those of other faiths.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain a resident Embassy in the country; the U.S. Ambassador in Suva, Fiji is accredited to the Government in Naku'alofa. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Fiji meet with religious officials and nongovernmental organizations during visits to the country.

TUVALU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is composed of 9 island groups with a total area of approximately 10 square miles and an estimated population of 9,500. The Church of Tuvalu, which has historic ties to the Congregational Church and other churches in Samoa, has the largest number of followers. There are no official figures on religious membership; however, government officials estimate membership as follows: Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 3 percent; Baha'i, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Catholic, 1 percent. There are also smaller numbers of Muslims, Baptists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and atheists.

All nine island groups have traditional chiefs who are members of the Church of Tuvalu. Most followers of other religions or denominations are found in Funafuti, the capital, with the exception of the relatively large proportion of followers of the Baha'i Faith on Nanumea Island.

There are a number of active Christian missionary organizations representing some of the same religious faiths practiced in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for separation of church and state. However, in practice government functions at the national and island council levels, such as the opening of Parliament, often include Christian prayers, clergy, or perspectives. By law, any new religious group with more than 50 members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution.

Missionaries practice without specific restrictions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In 2001 the country's sole radio station was sold to a private owner who charges all churches for radio broadcasting time except for daily morning devotions. The Church of Tuvalu, the largest and most popular church, continues to conduct the morning devotion program.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Interfaith relations generally are amicable, but reportedly there is a degree of social intolerance for non-Church of Tuvalu activities, particularly on some outer islands. Members of the Church of Tuvalu dominate most aspects of social and political life in the country, given that they comprise over 90 percent of the population.

There are no ecumenical movements.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji also is accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Fiji visit periodically to discuss religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Embassy officials also meet with representatives of the religious communities and nongovernmental organizations that have an interest in religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy actively supports efforts to improve and expand governmental and societal awareness of and protection for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion.

VANUATU

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by the report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Although traditions of communal decisionmaking at times conflict with the introduction of new churches in rural communities, government officials use modern law and traditional authority to maintain amicable relations among established and new churches. Both government policy and the strength of traditional authority figures contribute to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation, covering approximately 4,707 square miles; its population is approximately 183,000. The great majority of the population belongs to Christian churches, although many combine their Christian faith with some pre-Christian cultural practices. Church membership primarily is Presbyterian (approximately 48 percent), Roman Catholic (15 percent), and Anglican (12 percent). Another 30 percent are members of the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The John Frum Movement, a political party that also is an indigenous religious movement, is centered on the island of Tanna and includes less than 5 percent of the population. Muslims, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reportedly also are active. There are believed to be members of other religions within the foreign community who are free to practice their religions, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies.

Missionaries representing several Western churches brought Christianity to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some foreign missionaries continue this work; however, the clergy of the established churches now primarily are indigenous. Missionaries represent the Church of Christ, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics. Missionary activity includes the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which translates the New Testament into indigenous languages.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The preamble of the Constitution refers to a commitment to traditional values and Christian principles; however, the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

In 1995 in response to concerns expressed by some established churches about the activities of new missionary groups, such as the Holiness Fellowship, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Parliament passed the Religious Bodies Act, which requires religious organizations to register with the Government. A few churches have registered voluntarily under the act. Some churches were concerned that the legislation would have a chilling effect on missionary activity. However, although Parliament has made no effort to repeal the act, it remains dormant; two of the new missionary groups most likely to be affected reported that the legislation did not inhibit their religious practices during the period covered by this report.

The Government interacts with churches through the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Vanuatu Christian Council. Customarily, government oaths of office are taken on the Bible. The Government provides some financial help for the construction of churches for Vanuatu Christian Council members, provides grants to church operated schools, and pays teachers' salaries at church operated schools that have been in existence since the country's independence in 1980. These benefits are not available to non-Christian religious organizations. Government schools also schedule time each week for religious education conducted by representatives of council churches, using materials designed by those churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. Non-Christian religions are not permitted to teach their religions in public schools.

Aside from the activities of the Ministry of Home Affairs, use of government resources to support religious activities is not condoned (although there is no specific law prohibiting such support). If a formal request is given to the Government and permission is granted, governmental resources may be used. The Ombudsman's Office investigated the Minister of Health for allegedly using his office and stationery to solicit contributions for the John Frum Movement.

The Government does not attempt to control missionary activity.

There are no government-sponsored ecumenical activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general there are amicable relations between the religious communities; however, some churches and individuals object to the missionary activities of nontraditional denominations and continue to suggest that they be curtailed. There continues to be pressure to reinstate controls.

In rural areas, traditional Melanesian communal decisionmaking predominates. If a member of the community proposes to introduce a significant change within the community, such as the establishment of a new church, the chief and the rest of the community must agree. If a new church is established without community approval, the community views the action as a gesture of defiance by those who join the new church and as a threat to community solidarity. However, subsequent friction generally has been resolved through appeals from traditional leaders to uphold individual rights.

Religious representation at national events is organized through the Vanuatu Christian Council. Ecumenical activities of the council are limited to the interaction of its members.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting of human rights.

VIETNAM

Both the Constitution and government decrees provide for freedom of worship; however, the Government continued to restrict significantly those publicly organized activities of religious groups that were not recognized by the Government or that it declared to be at variance with state laws and policies. Although some non-recognized groups faced relatively few restrictions in practice, their status remained technically illegal. The Government generally allowed persons to practice individual worship in the religion of their choice, and participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow significantly. However, strict restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of religious groups remained in place, and the Government maintained supervisory control of the recognized religions, in part because the Communist Party (CPV) fears that not only organized religion but any organized group outside its control or supervision may weaken its authority and influence by serving as political, social, and spiritual alternatives to the authority of the central Government.

The CPV moved more formally to recognize and more fully to support the role of "legal" religious activity in society, but at the same time, citing the overriding importance of "national unity," asserted more explicitly its control over religious groups. Religious groups faced difficulties in training and ordaining clergy, and some restrictions in conducting educational and humanitarian activities. Religious figures encountered the greatest restrictions on their activities when they engaged in activities that the CPV perceived as political activism and a challenge to its rule. There have been credible reports since 1999 that officials pressured 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. Local police appeared also to have attempted to coerce some Protestants in Khanh Hoa province to abandon their faith during 2002. The penal code, as amended in 1997, established penalties for offenses that are defined only vaguely, including "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and non-believers." In some cases, particularly involving Hmong and Montagnard Protestants and Hoa Hao followers, when authorities charged persons with practicing religion illegally, they used Article 258 of the Penal Code that allowed for jail terms of up to 3 years for "abus(ing) the rights to freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of belief, religion, assembly, association and other democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State." 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 and the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights that Vietnam has ratified. According to credible reports, the police arbitrarily detained and sometimes beat religious believers, particularly in the mountainous ethnic minority areas. Police abuses of unrecognized Protestants in the Central Highlands in part were related to the Dega independence movement actively espoused by some groups that identify themselves as Protestants.

The Government controlled the administrative process leading to the creation of official organizations for the major sanctioned religions, including the naming of their officers. In some cases, (most notably with Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Buddhist, and Protestant followers), some former leaders of the unofficial pre-1975 organizations, as well as many believers, rejected the official organizations.

While there were some improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom in the country during the period covered by this report, the situation remained poor or worsened for many ethnic minority Protestants in the Central Highlands and Northwest Highlands. Official government recognition is required for all religious groups (as well as for social organizations) to operate legally; those without official status, especially certain sects and denominations of Buddhists, Protestants, Hoa Hao, and others, operated illegally. Oversight of recognized religions and harassment of unrecognized religious followers varied from locality to locality, often as a result of varying local interpretations of national policy. These restrictions were particularly harsh in the Central Highlands, the Northwest Highlands, and some other, mostly border, provinces during the period covered by this report, although the numbers of religious believers in those locations appears nonetheless to continue to grow. Religious practice and observance was generally less restricted in other parts of the country. During the period covered by this report, some members of unrecognized religious groups were beaten, arrested, and/or detained by the authorities. There were unverifiable reports that between one and seven ethnic minority Protestants died in police custody or died as a result of beatings during the period covered by this report. The Government confirmed the death of only one, but stated that it was due to natural causes. In April 2001, the Government officially recognized the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV). The Government also recognized some additional SECV congregations during the period covered by this report. However, the SECV complained that the Government forced over 400 congregations in the Central Highlands that were affiliated with the SECV's underground predecessor to disband since 2001. The Government also reportedly destroyed or forced the demolition of a number of buildings used for worship in the Central Highlands. Since ethnic unrest in February 2001 in the Central Highlands provinces of Gia Lai and Dak Lak, the Government has taken action against Protestant ethnic minorities whom it suspected of participating in unauthorized political activities. Many of these Protestant ethnic minorities, however, did not belong to recognized denominations, and were not protesting for religious reasons, but rather were protesting against the loss of traditional homelands to recent migrants, mostly ethnic Vietnamese, and abusive police treatment in the provinces. The authorities detained several Protestant leaders during the reporting period and security forces harassed some local Christians. Ethnic minority Protestants reportedly continued to be forced or pressured to recant their faith, especially those suspected of belonging to the Dega movement, which advocated political autonomy for the region. Foreign diplomats visited the Central and Northwest Highlands several times during the period covered by this report, although the provinces continued to provide "escorts" and plainclothes "security." The Government continued to restrict or supervise closely access to these provinces by diplomats, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), journalists, and other foreigners, making it difficult to verify conditions in those areas. In a few areas, police routinely questioned persons on account of their religious views and arbitrarily detained some religious believers whose activities were deemed to constitute illegal gatherings or other violations of criminal law. Local offi-

cials occasionally broke up unsanctioned religious meetings, apparently using a noxious gas on one such occasion, and arbitrarily subjected groups of Protestant Christians who were worshipping in house churches in ethnic minority areas to detention and harassment. Authorities also imprisoned persons under article 258 of the Penal Code for "using religion to infringe upon the interests of the State."

During the July 2002 to June 2003 period covered by this report, the Government lifted house arrest-like restrictions on Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and ended administrative detention on deputy head Thich Quang Do of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV). Subsequent to the end of the reporting period, however, severe restrictions were reimposed on these and other UBCV members.

The relationship among religions in society generally is amicable. In various parts of the country, there were modest levels of cooperation and dialog between Catholics and Protestants, Buddhists and Hoa Hao, and also between Buddhists and Cao Dai. Dialog between Buddhist groups inside and outside government recognized structures increased during the reporting period. Religious figures from most major recognized religions participated in official bodies such as the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the National Assembly.

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) maintained an active and regular dialog with senior and working-level government officials to advocate greater religious freedom. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. officials discussed concerns about the repression of Protestantism in the Central and Northwest Highlands, detention and arrest of religious figures, and other restrictions on religious freedom with cabinet ministers, Communist Party officials, provincial officials, and others. Intervention by the U.S. Government may have prompted the Government to improve treatment of some prominent but nonrecognized Buddhist leaders, to moderate treatment of some ethnic minority Protestants in some Central Highlands provinces, as well as to promote some liberalization of Government treatment of other religions.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 127,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 80 million. The Government officially recognizes one Buddhist organization (Buddhists make up approximately 50 percent of the population), the Roman Catholic Church (Catholics make up 8 to 10 percent of the population), several Cao Dai organizations (Cao Dai followers make up 1.5 to 3 percent of the population), one Hoa Hao organization (Hoa Hao followers make up 1.5 to 4 percent of the population), two Protestant organizations (Protestants make up 1.2 percent of the population), and one Muslim organization (Muslims make up 0.1 percent of the population). Most other Vietnamese citizens consider themselves nonreligious.

Among the country's religious communities, Buddhism is the dominant religious belief. Many Buddhists practice an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian traditions that sometimes is called the country's "triple religion." Some estimates suggest that more than half of the population is at least nominally Buddhist. Buddhists typically visit pagodas on festival days, and have a worldview that is shaped in part by Buddhism, but in reality these beliefs often rely on a very expansive definition of the faith. Many individuals, especially among the ethnic majority Kinh, who may not consider themselves Buddhist, nonetheless follow traditional Confucian and Taoist practices and often visit Buddhist temples. One prominent Buddhist official has estimated that only about 30 percent of Buddhists are devout and practice their faith regularly. The Office of Religious Affairs uses a much lower estimate of 8 million practicing Buddhists. Mahayana Buddhists, most of whom are part of the ethnic Kinh majority, are found throughout the country, especially in the populous areas of the northern and southern delta regions. There are fewer Buddhists, proportionately, in certain highland areas, although migration of Kinh to highland areas is changing the distribution somewhat. Mahayana Buddhist monks in the country historically have engaged on occasion in political and social issues, most notably during the 1960s, when some monks campaigned for peace and against perceived injustices in the former Republic of Vietnam. A Khmer ethnic minority in the south practices Theravada Buddhism. Numbering just over 1 million persons, they live almost exclusively in the Mekong Delta.

There are an estimated 6 to 7 million Roman Catholics in the country (approximately 8 to 10 percent of the population). French missionaries introduced the religion in the 17th century. In the 1940's, priests in the large Catholic dioceses of Phat Diem and Bui Chu, to the southeast of Hanoi, organized a political association with a militia that fought against the Communist guerrillas until defeated in 1954. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics from the northern part of the country fled to Saigon and the surrounding areas ahead of the 1954 partition of North and South. Catho-

lics live throughout the country, but the largest concentrations remain in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has revived in northern regions. In recent years, congregations in the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong and many nearby provinces have rebuilt churches and reinstituted religious services. The proportion of Catholics in the population of some provinces appears to be increasing modestly.

Recently, several bishoprics that had been vacant for a number of years were filled by the Vatican, in coordination with the Government. In June 2000, a bishop was named for Da Nang, and in August 2000, a bishop was named for Vinh Long. During a Vatican delegation's visit in June 2001, the Government reportedly agreed to the Vatican's appointment of three additional bishops: a new bishop for Bui Chu Diocese; an auxiliary bishop for HCMC; and a coadjutor bishop for Phan Thiet. During the reporting period bishops were ordained for Lang Son and Haiphong. Shortly after the end of the period covered by the report, new bishops were also named for Kon Tum and Hung Hoa Dioceses, leaving open only the bishopric of Thanh Hoa, where the incumbent died in 2003. Provincial authorities have explicit veto power over the transfer of priests and the assignment of newly ordained priests, and exercised that power during the period covered by this report. Some seminary graduates have waited up to 10 years before the government consents to their ordination, although they usually serve in some capacity while waiting and this appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Government officials have stated that they "view the Catholic Church as a positive force."

There are at least 1,000,000 Protestants in the country (over 1.2 percent of the population), with more than half of these persons belonging to a large number of unregistered evangelical underground churches that often operate in members' homes, frequently in rural villages and ethnic minority areas. Protestantism, particularly the house church movement in ethnic minority areas, is the fastest growing religion in the country. Perhaps as many as 175,000 or more of the followers of house churches are Pentecostals. Protestantism in the country dates from 1911, when a Canadian missionary from the Christian and Missionary Alliance arrived in Da Nang. Numerous reports from believers indicated that Protestant church attendance continued to grow during the period covered by this report, especially among the house churches, despite continued government restrictions on proselytizing activities. Based on believers' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including ethnic Hmong, Thai, and other ethnic minorities (an estimated 200,000 followers) in the northwest provinces and some 350,000 members of ethnic minority groups of the Central Highlands (Ede, Jarai, Bahnar, and Koho, among others). The house church movement in the northwest was sparked in part by Hmong language radio broadcasts from the Philippines beginning in the late 1980's. In more recent years, missionaries, mostly ethnic Hmong, have increased evangelism in the area.

The Cao Dai religion was founded in 1926 in the southern part of the country. The Office of Religious Affairs estimates that there are 1.1 million Cao Dai. Some NGO sources estimate that there are from 2 to 3 million followers. Cao Dai groups are most active in Tay Ninh Province, where the Cao Dai "Holy See" is located, and in HCMC and the Mekong Delta. There are approximately 13 separate groups within the Cao Dai religion; the largest is the Tay Ninh sect, which is comprised of more than half of all Cao Dai believers. The Cao Dai religion is syncretistic, combining elements of many faiths. Its basic belief system is influenced strongly by Mahayana Buddhism, although it recognizes a diverse array of persons who have conveyed divine revelation, including Siddhartha, Jesus, Lao-Tse, Confucius, and Moses. During the 1940's and 1950's, the Cao Dai participated in political and military activities. Their opposition to the Communist forces until 1975 was a factor in government repression after 1975. A small Cao Dai organization, the Thien Tien sect, was formally recognized in 1995. The Tay Ninh Cao Dai sect was granted legal recognition in 1997.

The Hoa Hao branch of Buddhism was founded in the southern part of the country in 1939. Hoa Hao is largely a quietist faith, emphasizing private acts of worship and devotion; it does not have a priesthood and rejects many of the ceremonial aspects of mainstream Buddhism. According to the Office of Religious Affairs, there are 1.3 million Hoa Hao followers; affiliated expatriate groups estimate that there may be up to 3 million followers. Hoa Hao followers are concentrated in the Mekong Delta, particularly in provinces such as An Giang, where the Hoa Hao were dominant as a political and military, as well as a religious, force before 1975. Elements of the Hoa Hao were among the last to surrender to Communist forces in the Mekong Delta in the summer of 1975. The Government recognized Hoa Hao Administrative Committee was organized in 1999.

Mosques serving the country's small Muslim population, estimated at 65,000 persons, operate in western An Giang province, HCMC, Hanoi, and provinces in the southern coastal part of the country. The Muslim community mainly is composed of ethnic Cham, although in HCMC and An Giang province it includes some ethnic Vietnamese and migrants originally from Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. About half of the Muslims in the country practice Sunni Islam. Sunni Muslims are concentrated in five locations around the country. Approximately 15,000 live in Tan Chau district of western An Giang province, which borders Cambodia. Nearly 3,000 live in western Tay Ninh province, which also borders Cambodia. More than 5,000 Muslims reside in HCMC, with 2,000 residing in neighboring Dong Nai province. Another 5,000 live in the south central coastal provinces of Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. Approximately 50 percent of Muslims practice Bani Islam, a type of Islam unique to the ethnic Cham who live on the central coast of the country. Bani clerics fast during Ramadan; ordinary Bani followers do not. The Bani Koran is an abridged version of only about 20 pages, written in the Cham language. The Bani also continue to participate in certain traditional Cham festivals, which include prayers to Hindu gods and to traditional Cham "mother goddesses." Both groups of Muslims appear to be on cordial terms with the Government and are able to practice their faith freely. They have limited contact with Muslims in foreign countries, such as Malaysia.

There are a variety of smaller religious communities not recognized by the Government, the largest of which is the Hindu community. Approximately 50,000 ethnic Cham in the south-central coastal area practice a devotional form of Hinduism. Another 4,000 Hindus live in HCMC; some are ethnic Cham, but most are Indian or of mixed Indian-Vietnamese descent.

There are estimated to be from several hundred to 2,000 members of the Baha'i faith, largely concentrated in the south, a number of whom are foreign-born. Prior to 1975, there were an estimated 130,000 believers, according to Baha'i officials.

There are several hundred members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) who are spread throughout the country but live primarily in HCMC and Hanoi. Some are pre-1975 converts, while others became Mormons while living in Cambodia.

Of the country's approximately 80 million citizens, 14 million or more reportedly do not practice any organized religion. Some sources strictly define those considered to be practicing Buddhists, excluding those whose activities are limited to visiting pagodas on ceremonial holidays. Using this definition, the number of nonreligious persons would be much higher, perhaps as high as 50 million. No statistics are available on the level of participation in formal religious services, but it generally is acknowledged that this number has continued to increase from the early 1990s.

Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 14 percent of the overall population. The minorities historically have practiced sets of traditional beliefs different from those of the ethnic majority Kinh. Except for the Khmer and the Cham, most minorities are more likely to be Protestant than the majority Kinh.

Several dozen foreign missionary groups throughout the country are engaged in developmental, humanitarian, educational, and relief efforts. These organizations legally are registered as NGOs providing humanitarian assistance. Foreign missionaries legally are not permitted to proselytize or to carry out religious activities. In order to work in the country, they must be registered with the Government as an international NGO. Undeclared missionaries from several countries are active in Vietnam.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, government decrees, and January 2003 CPV Central Committee resolution on religion provide for freedom of belief and worship as well as of nonbelief; however, the Government continued to restrict significantly those organized activities of religious groups that it declared to be at variance with state laws and policies. The Government generally allowed persons to practice individual worship freely and to participate in public worship under the leadership of any of the major recognized religions; the Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Muslim faiths. In some localities authorities even allowed many members of unregistered religious groups to practice their faith freely. Participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow significantly. However, the Government used regulations to control religious hierarchies, organized religious activities, and other activities of religious groups. While the Office on Religious Affairs oversees recognized religious bodies and is tasked with protecting their rights, in practice there are few effective legal remedies for violations of religious freedom

committed by government officials. The constitutional right of freedom of belief and religion is interpreted and enforced unevenly. In some areas, local officials allow relatively wide latitude to believers; in other provinces in the north, the Central Highlands, and the central coast, religious believers in nonrecognized entities are subject to significant harassment because of the lack of effective legal enforcement, and are subject to the whims and prejudices of local officials in their respective jurisdictions. This particularly was true for Protestants in highland areas, very few of whom are affiliated with one of the two recognized Protestant organizations. There are no known cases in recent years in which the courts acted to interpret laws so as to protect a person's right to religious freedom.

The secular Government does not favor a particular religion, and virtually all senior Government and Party officials as well as the vast majority of National Assembly delegates are formally "without religion." The prominent traditional position of Buddhism does not affect religious freedom for others adversely, including those who wish not to practice a religion. The Constitution expressly protects the right of "nonbelief" as well as "belief." The Government requires religious and other groups to register and uses this process to monitor and control religious organizations, as it does with all social organizations. The Government officially recognizes Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Muslim religious organizations. However, some leaders of Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai organizations and many believers of these religions, do not recognize or participate in the government-approved associations. Some leaders of the pre-1975 Buddhist and Hoa Hao religious bodies unsuccessfully have requested official recognition of their organizations. Their activities, and those of the unregistered Protestant house churches, are considered illegal by the authorities, and they sometimes experience harassment as a result. Some unregistered Protestant denominations are negotiating with the Government for recognition, and other Protestant non-official churches are seeking affiliation with one of the two existing recognized organizations. Under the law, only those activities and organizations expressly sanctioned by the Government are deemed to be legal. In order for a group to obtain official recognition, it must obtain government approval of its leadership, its structure, and the overall scope of its activities. Recognized religious groups in principle are allowed to open, operate, and refurbish places of worship, to train religious leaders, and to obtain permission for the publication of materials.

Officially recognized religious organizations are able to operate openly in most parts of the country, and followers of these religions are able to worship without government harassment. Officially recognized organizations must consult with the Government about their religious and administrative operations, including leadership selection, although not about their religious tenets of faith. While the Government does not directly appoint the leadership of the official religious organizations, to varying degrees it plays an influential role in shaping the process of selection and must approve investitures of religious titles. The Government's influence varies by level of the title, religion, and local authority. For example, the power to approve a religious office holder below the provincial level lies with the provincial government. Higher level officials receive much closer scrutiny. Decree 26/1999 explicitly gives the Government the power to approve all holders of religious offices, and the Government effectively, but not explicitly, has veto power. In general, religious bodies are confined to dealing specifically with spiritual and organizational matters. Over the past several years, the Government has accorded much greater latitude to followers of recognized religious organizations, and the majority of the country's religious followers have continued to benefit from this development. The Government has held conferences to discuss and publicize its religious decrees. The CPV issued a resolution on religion during the reporting period and also held seminars throughout Vietnam to inform authorities about the resolution, which reaffirmed the right to believe but reiterated the need for all religious activities to be "legal," thus facilitating government control. The Religious Affairs Committee has frequently met with house church leaders from HCMC and the Central Highlands.

Religious organizations must register their regular activities with the authorities annually. Religious organizations must obtain government permission to hold training seminars, conventions, and celebrations outside the regular religious calendar; to build or remodel places of worship; to engage in charitable activities; to operate religious schools; and to train, ordain, promote, or transfer clergy. They also must obtain government permission for large mass gatherings, as do non-religious groups. Many of these restrictive powers lie principally with provincial or city people's committees, and local treatment of religious persons varies widely. In April 2001, the Government recognized the SECV. The SECV was able to elect its own officers, apparently free of government control. The newly recognized church is represented in all of the southern provinces of the country. The SECV is descended from churches

associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA). Some additional "underground" congregations that were once affiliated with the CMA reportedly joined the SECV. However, the Government has allowed few former CMA churches in the Central Highlands to join the SECV. The northern branch of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN), which also is a derivative of the CMA, has been recognized since 1963 and officially has 15 approved churches in the northern part of the country. During the reporting period the ECVN enrolled over seven hundred, mostly ethnic minority congregations in northern and northwestern Vietnam, and issued them papers certifying the groups as members of the EVCN. The ECVN intends to officially request government recognition of the new congregations after its convention, which the church hopes to hold in 2004, if it is able to come to agreement with the Government. A number of other Protestant denominations continued to be engaged in discussions with the Government on registration during the period covered by this report.

The Government turned down an attempt by the Baha'i faith to register in 2001 because the Baha'i had not yet met the administrative criteria for registration. It is unknown which specific criteria the Baha'is were unable to satisfy.

The degree of Government control of church activities varied greatly among localities. In some areas, especially in the south and in Danang, Catholic churches operated kindergartens and engaged in a variety of humanitarian projects. Buddhist groups engaged in humanitarian activities in many parts of the country. The Hoa Hao organization reported that it engaged in numerous charitable activities and local development projects. Foreign missionaries and religious organizations are not allowed to operate as such in the country, but many are registered as NGOs with the Government to carry out humanitarian assistance. They may not engage in proselytizing.

Most Catholic churches are allowed to provide religious education to children. Children also are taught religion and language at Khmer Buddhist pagodas and at mosques outside regular classroom hours.

Because of the lack of meaningful due process in the legal system, the actions of religious adherents are subject to the discretion of local officials in their respective jurisdictions. There are no meaningful punishments for government officials who do not follow laws protecting religious practice in particular. Because the court system is subservient to the Communist Party and its political decisions, and because persons are not charged specifically with religious offenses, there are no known recent cases in which the courts acted to interpret laws so as to protect a person's right to religious freedom.

There are no specific religious national holidays.

The Office of Religious Affairs occasionally hosts meetings for leaders of diverse religious traditions to address religious matters.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to maintain broad legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom, although in many areas, Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and the Government reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Operational and organizational restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of recognized religious groups remained in place. Religious groups faced difficulty in obtaining teaching materials, expanding training facilities, publishing religious materials, and expanding the number of clergy in religious training in response to increased demand from congregations, although these types of restrictions appear to have been easing gradually for several years.

The Government continued to ban and actively discourage participation in what it regards as illegal religious groups, including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) and Protestant house churches, as well as the unapproved Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. The withholding of official recognition of religious bodies is one of the means by which the Government actively restricts religious activities. Religious and organizational activities by UBCV monks are illegal, and all UBCV activities outside of private temple worship are proscribed. Many evangelical house churches do not attempt to register because they believe that their applications would be denied, or because they want to avoid any semblance of government control. Some recognized religious groups carry out underground activities that they do not report to the Government and have faced little or no harassment. Some nonrecognized Protestant denominations also conduct religious services and training with tacit approval from the Government.

The Government requires all Buddhist monks to work under the officially recognized Buddhist organization, the Central Buddhist Church of Vietnam (CBS). The Government influenced the selection of the leadership of the CBS, excluding many leaders and supporters of the pre-1975 UBCV organization. Some UBCV leaders and

followers refused to acknowledge the CBS on the grounds of its connection with the Government. The Government also restricted the number of Buddhist monks that may be trained. Khmer Theravada Buddhists are allowed a somewhat separate identity with the CBS. The Government continued to oppose efforts by the unrecognized UBCV to operate independently. Talks between CBS and UBCV leaders about unification of their organizations occurred near the end of the reporting period. Several prominent UBCV monks faced Government restrictions on their civil liberties during the period covered by this report. Restrictions on UBCV leader Thich Huyen Quang and deputy leader Thich Quang Do were lessened during the period covered by this report. Though previously held in conditions similar to house arrest, Thich Huyen Quang traveled to Hanoi for medical treatment in March, and met Prime Minister Phan Van Khai during that trip. Thich Quang Do was released from administrative detention in June. (Since the end of the period covered by this report, restrictions have been reimposed on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do).

Buddhist UBCV monks in Hue complained in 2001 and 2002 that petitions to local authorities for permission to repair or renovate pagodas go unanswered. The UBCV monks in Hue have complained that the CBS has "donated" Buddhist properties for government use. Buddhist believers in Ha Nam province complained in 2002 that CBS pagoda grounds have been seized in recent years and that their complaints go unanswered. Monks at the One Pillar Pagoda (CBS) in Hanoi have resisted local government efforts to replace them with monks favored by the local government. The Roman Catholic Church continued to face many restrictions on the training and ordination of priests, nuns, and bishops. The Government effectively maintains veto power over Vatican appointments of bishops; however, in practice it has sought to cooperate with the Church in nominations for appointment. The Prime Minister received the Episcopal Council (the grouping of Bishops nationwide) for the first time in December 2001 and met them again in December 2002. During the period covered by this report, the Catholic Church hierarchy remained frustrated by government restrictions; but it has sought to accommodate itself to them. A number of clergy reported a modest easing of government control over church activities in certain dioceses, including in a few churches in Hanoi and HCMC that offer English-language masses for expatriates. The Church was able to engage in religious education, including the education of children, and to perform charitable activities in some geographic areas. Six Roman Catholic seminaries throughout the country had over 800 students enrolled; new seminarians are recruited every 2 years. The national Government approved a seventh seminary, but the provincial government where it was to be located blocked the seminary on the grounds that the province had no office to oversee institutions of higher education. The Catholic Church is now attempting to locate the seminary in a different province. All students must be approved by local authorities, both upon entering the seminary and prior to their ordination as priests. The Church believes that the number of students being ordained is insufficient to support the growing Catholic population.

Until 2001, approximately 15 Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) churches in the northern provinces were the only officially recognized Protestant churches. The ECVN has not held an annual meeting or elected new leadership since 1988, reportedly because the Government and the ECVN have been unable to reach consensus on new ECVN leadership. The GVN agreed to the formal appointment of the longstanding Acting Chairman in June 2003, and has indicated that the next general congress could take place in early 2004. The ECVN operated a theological school from 1988 to 1993; informal training of religious and lay leaders continues. The Government reportedly has rebuffed attempts by largely Hmong house churches to affiliate with the ECVN over the last several years. The ECVN began enrolling several hundred mostly ethnic minority congregations located in the northern and northwestern highlands from September 2002, although the Government has not publicly accepted these enrollments and they remain unrecognized and, therefore, vulnerable to harassment and restrictions. On April 17, 2002, the former ECVN church building in Vinh, Nghe An province was torn down. The Government had expropriated the building in the 1960's and the congregation since has been meeting in members' homes.

In April 2001, the Government conferred legal recognition on the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV). This body represents several hundred Protestant churches primarily in the southern part of the country, with representatives from every southern province, including the Central Highlands, where many house churches operate. Some SECV churches exist in other large cities such as Da Nang. Officials in the SECV's main HCMC office have stated that gradual progress in improving their church's situation was determined to be preferable to outright confrontation with the Government. The SECV opened a Government-sanctioned theological school in HCMC in February 2003 with almost 50 students. Provincial gov-

ernments have recognized only twenty of the several hundred congregations in the Central Highlands that were affiliated with the SECV's underground predecessor. It remains unclear to what extent provincial officials will allow these churches, particularly those whose members are ethnic minorities, to be represented by or to participate in the organization. Some Protestant pastors in the Central Highlands remain suspicious of the SECV and reportedly do not plan to seek affiliation with it.

Many pastors of Protestant denominations such as Baptists, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Mennonites, and the Assemblies of God (AOG) still do not wish to join the SECV because of doctrinal differences. The Government has held discussions about recognition and registration with leaders of at least four Protestant denominations including Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists. The Government had repressed the AOG by causing members to lose their jobs, forbidding their children from attending school, or confiscating their property, but it no longer imprisons AOG believers or pastors. In at least some—primarily urban—areas, Government harassment of Pentecostals diminished during the reporting period. Some Mennonites have faced harassment by government officials in some parts of the country during the reporting period.

The provincial governments restrict Protestant practice in the Central Highlands, particularly among the region's ethnic minorities, such as the Mnong, Ede, Jarai and Bahnar. Christmas celebrations by Protestants in the Central Highlands were allowed in some localities, but prohibited in others. There is substantial networking among Protestant denominations in HCMC, but less in the rest of the country. Underground churches from pre-1975 denominations generally were reported to have fewer restrictions than those that were established more recently. Officials in Lai Chau, Ha Giang, and other provinces in the north and northwest attempted to pressure Hmong and other ethnic minority Christians to renounce their faith, often without success. Some local officials reportedly also encouraged Hmong clan elders to convince members of their clans to renounce their faith. Efforts to force Protestants to deny their faith appear to be connected to the CPV's Program 184, designed to reverse the spread of Protestantism in areas where it has been advancing rapidly. Local and provincial officials in these areas circulated official documents urging persons to give up their illegal "foreign" religion and to practice traditional animist beliefs and ancestor worship. Regional and police newspapers printed articles documenting how persons were deceived into following the house church "cults." A Khanh Hoa provincial police document from May 2002 discussed some successes in convincing individuals to renounce the Protestant faith, whereupon the individuals were given financial rewards. The Government Office of Religious Affairs has not responded to Embassy requests to investigate and report. Officials appear to have used a noxious gas, perhaps tear gas or pepper spray, to break up a Protestant service in Lau Chau province in late December 2002, reportedly causing at least one woman pregnant woman to miscarry.

The Hoa Hao have faced severe restrictions on their religious and political activities since 1975, in part because of their previous armed opposition to the Communist forces. After 1975 all administrative offices, places of worship, and social and cultural institutions connected to the Hoa Hao faith were closed. Believers continued to practice their religion at home but the lack of access to public gathering places contributed to the Hoa Hao community's isolation and fragmentation. A new official Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Representative Committee, was formed in 1999. Several leaders of the Hoa Hao community, including several pre-1975 leaders, openly criticized the committee, claiming that it was subservient to the Government, and demanded official recognition of their own Hoa Hao body instead. The Government turned down a group that subsequently tried to register an independent Hoa Hao organization. Some members of this group were incarcerated and remained in custody at the end of the reporting period, although one was released in an amnesty in September 2002 and another completed his prison sentence in 2002. According to the Hoa Hao Administrative Council and local media, turnout for major Hoa Hao festivals range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands each year. The Government restricts the number of clergy that the Hoa Hao can train.

The Government never dissolved the Cao Dai church but placed it under the control of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in 1977. The Government banned several of its essential ceremonies because it considered them to be "superstitious," and it imprisoned and reportedly killed many Cao Dai clergy in the late 1970's. The Government began recognizing Cao Dai organizations in 1995. In 1997, a Cao Dai Management Council drew up a new constitution under government oversight. It confirmed the ban on certain traditional "superstitious" rituals, including the use of mediums to communicate with spirits. Because the use of mediums was essential to ceremonies accompanying promotion of clerics to higher ranks, the new Cao Dai constitution effectively banned clerical promotions. In December 1999 the Management

Council reached agreement with Cao Dai clergy that the Cao Dai church would modify its rituals in a way that would be acceptable to the Government, but maintain enough spiritual direction to be acceptable to Cao Dai principles. As a result, a congress was held in which several hundred Cao Dai clergy were promoted for the first time since 1975. A second congress was held in September 2002, with numerous additional promotions. The Cao Dai Management Council has the power to control all of the affairs of the Cao Dai faith, and thereby manages the church's operations, its hierarchy, and its clergy within the country. Independent Cao Dai officials oppose the edicts of this council as unfaithful to Cao Dai principles and traditions. Religious training takes place at individual Cao Dai temples rather than at centralized schools; Cao Dai officials have indicated that they do not wish to open a seminary.

The Muslim Association of Vietnam was banned in 1975 but reauthorized in 1992. It is the only registered Muslim organization in the country. Association leaders state that they are able to practice their faith, including saying daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and teaching the Koran. At least 55 Muslims journeyed to Mecca for the Hajj in 2001; Saudi Arabia and Dubai paid their travel expenses. In 2002 no Muslims made the Hajj. Muslim sources in the country stated this was because the traditional financial sponsors had curtailed their foreign sponsorships in late 2001, not because of any restriction on travel for the Hajj on the part of the Government. Overseas financial sponsorship resumed in 2003 and some Muslims made the Hajj.

The Government restricts and monitors all forms of public assembly, including assembly for religious activities; however, on some occasions, large religious gatherings have been allowed, such as the Catholic celebrations at La Vang, and the 2002 Easter sunrise service, which was witnessed by foreign dignitaries in Kon Tum, and which was attended by over 10,000 Catholic worshippers. Attendance at Buddhist festivals and pilgrimage sites has increased dramatically in recent years. The Hoa Hao also have been allowed to hold large public gatherings in An Giang province on certain Hoa Hao festival days since 1999. Estimates of attendance at the Founding Day and commemoration of the Founder's death range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands each year since then.

In April 1999, the Government issued a decree on religion that prescribed the rights and responsibilities of religious believers. The religious decree states that persons formerly detained or imprisoned must obtain special permission from the authorities before they may resume religious activities. Religious activities reportedly are not allowed in prisons, nor are visits by religious workers. Some persons previously detained were released and were active in their religious communities during the period covered by this report.

The Government prohibits proselytizing by foreign missionary groups and discourages public proselytizing outside of recognized worship centers even by Vietnamese citizens. Some missionaries visited the country despite this prohibition and carried on informal proselytizing activities. The Government has in the past deported some foreign persons for unauthorized proselytizing, sometimes defining proselytizing very broadly, although there were no known cases during the reporting period. Other individuals apparently suspected of proselytizing have been unable to renew their visas or had valid visas revoked. Non-citizens must comply with the law when practicing their religions. In both Hanoi and HCMC, there were Sunday morning Catholic masses conducted in English by local Vietnamese priests for the convenience of foreigners. In both cities, there also were well-publicized Protestant worship services for foreigners conducted by foreigners, some of whom were affiliated with religious NGOs; these activities are permitted under the 1999 decree. There were regularly scheduled Muslim services for citizens and foreigners in both cities.

The Government technically forbids persons who belong to unofficial religious groups from speaking publicly about their beliefs, but at least some continue to conduct religious training and services without harassment. In limited circumstances, members of registered groups are permitted to speak about their beliefs and attempt to persuade others to adopt their religions, although public proselytizing is not allowed. The Government has been known to restrict religious speech on various legal pretexts including "sowing division between believers and non-believers" and "damaging national unity."

The Government officially requires all religious publishing to be done by the Religious Publishing House, which is a part of the Office of Religious Affairs, or by other government approved publishing houses once the Government approves the proposed items. A range of Buddhist sacred scriptures, Bibles, and other religious texts and publications are printed by these organizations and are distributed openly. The government-sanctioned Committee has printed 250,000 copies of publications of parts of the Hoa Hao sacred scriptures, along with 100,000 volumes featuring the

Founder's teachings and prophesies; however, Hoa Hao believers reported that the Government continued to restrict the distribution of the full scriptures, specifically the poetry of the Founder. However, the official Hoa Hao Representative Committee cited a lack of funds, not government restrictions, as the reason why the Hoa Hao scriptures had not yet been published in full. The Muslim Association reportedly was able to print enough copies of the Koran in 2000 to distribute one to each Muslim believer in the country.

The Government allows religious travel for religious persons; Muslims are able to undertake the Hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials also have been able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Some religious believers who do not belong to officially recognized religions, such as Buddhist monk Thich Thai Hoa, occasionally have not been approved for foreign travel, but many ministers of underground Protestant churches have been able to travel overseas since early 2001. Like other citizens, religious persons who travel abroad sometimes are questioned about their activities upon their return and required to surrender their passports. However, this practice appears to be becoming more infrequent and even many leaders of underground Protestant churches reported in 2002 and 2003 that they were not questioned. Catholic bishops face no restrictions on international travel, including to Rome, and many nuns have also been able to go abroad for study and conferences. The Government allowed many Catholic bishops and priests to travel freely within their dioceses and allowed greater, but still sometimes restricted, freedom for domestic travel outside of these areas, particularly in many ethnic areas. Local officials reportedly discourage priests from entering Son La and Lai Chau provinces, where there are no Catholic churches.

Religious affiliation is indicated on citizens' national identification cards and on "family books," which are household identification documents. In practice, many citizens who consider themselves religious do not indicate this on their identification card, and government statistics list them as non-religious. There are no formal prohibitions on changing one's religion; in principle, it is possible to change the entry for religion on national identification cards, but many converts may not go to the trouble. Formal conversions appear to be relatively rare. The Government does not designate persons' religions on passports. The Government allows, and in some cases encourages, links by officially recognized religious bodies with coreligionists in other countries. However, the Government actively discourages contacts between the UBCV and its foreign Buddhist supporters. Contacts between Vatican authorities and the domestic Catholic Church occur routinely, and the Government maintains a regular, active dialog with the Vatican on a range of issues including organizational activities, the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations, and a possible papal visit. Contacts between some illegal Protestant organizations such as the house churches and their foreign supporters are discouraged but appear to occur regularly, including provision of some financial support. The Government is particularly vigilant about contact between "Dega" Protestants and their overseas supporters. A Dega group overseas has set up a self-proclaimed government in exile and contacted some individuals in Vietnam to advance its agenda. Authorities, particularly in the Central Highlands, seem to have made little effort to distinguish Dega Protestants from the much larger number of apolitical Protestant believers. The Government also claims that Protestantism in the Hmong community is a front for Hmong nationalism, although very few Hmong Protestants are likely to ascribe to a separatist agenda.

Adherence to a religious faith generally does not disadvantage persons in civil, economic, and secular life, although it likely would prevent advancement to the highest government and military ranks. Attainment of senior military rank is not a prerequisite for senior government or private sector employment. The military does not have a chaplaincy. Avowed religious practice was formerly a bar to membership in the Communist Party. Party sources indicated that tens of thousands of the 2.6 million Communist Party members are religious believers and the January 2003 Party resolution on religion called for recruiting and advancing more religious believers into the Party's ranks. Party and government officials routinely visited pagodas and temples and sometimes even attended Christian church services.

The religious decree of April 1999 stipulates which local government offices must approve renovations, modifications, and repairs of religious structures. It also requires groups to obtain the approval of provincial governments before constructing religious structures. Local authorities have reportedly used these measures to justify the closure and demolition of religious structures belonging to unregistered Protestant groups, particularly in Dak Lak and other Central Highlands provinces. The decree stated that no religious organization can reclaim lands or properties taken over by the State following the end of the 1954 war against French rule and the 1975 Communist victory in the south. Despite this blanket prohibition, the Govern-

ment has returned some church properties confiscated since 1975. The People's Committee of HCMC returned two properties to the Catholic Church in 2001 after the Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City wrote authorities requesting their return. On one of the properties, in Cu Chi District, the church is constructing an HIV/AIDS hospice to be operated by the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. The other property is now a church-operated orphanage. One of the vice-chairmen of the official Buddhist Sangha stated that approximately 30 percent of Buddhist properties confiscated in HCMC have been returned since 1975, and from 5 to 10 percent of all Buddhist properties confiscated in the south have been returned. However, UBCV leaders stated that their properties were not returned. The former Protestant seminary in Nha Trang is used for secular purposes, as is a former Protestant seminary in Hanoi. Most Cao Dai and Hoa Hao properties also have not been returned, according to church leaders. The official Representative Committee for the Hoa Hao stated that the Government returned 12 previously confiscated Hoa Hao pagodas in Dong Thap province in 2001 and 2002.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; however, it does permit clergy to teach at universities in subjects in which they are qualified. Buddhist monks have also lectured at the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, the main CPV school. Several Catholic nuns and at least one Catholic priest teach at HCMC universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic religious education, on weekends or evenings, is permitted in most areas and has increased in recent years in churches throughout the country. Khmer Theravada Buddhists and Cham Muslims regularly hold religious and language classes outside of normal classroom hours in their respective pagodas and mosques.

In March 2001, teachers at a public primary school in Ban Don district reportedly ordered all the Christian students to renounce Christ. When the students refused, they were suspended from school and not allowed to return until further notice. Local sources alleged that authorities in many localities in Dak Lak prohibited Protestant children from attending school past the third grade. The outcome of this episode is not known. Similar allegations have been made regarding Lai Chau, Ha Giang, and Cao Bang provinces in the Northwest Highlands. Also, there have been unconfirmed allegations that Christians are excluded from special ethnic minority boarding schools. Discrimination of this sort has been denied by local authorities, but such reports persist.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A significant number of religious believers experience harassment because they operate without legal sanction. Local officials have repressed unregistered Protestant believers in the northwest provinces, the Central Highlands, and other areas, through forcing church gatherings to cease, the demolition of church buildings, and through pressure to renounce their religious beliefs. Some UBCV leaders continued to be harassed and had their rights severely restricted by the Government. Officials also have detained or otherwise harassed some persons, primarily Buddhists and ethnic majority Kinh, who have used purported spiritual activities or powers to cheat and deceive believers. Police authorities routinely question persons who hold independent religious or political views. There are credible reports that police arbitrarily detained, beat, and harassed an unknown number of persons based on their religious beliefs and practice, particularly in mountainous ethnic minority areas.

The penal code establishes penalties for offenses that are defined only vaguely, including "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and non-believers." In some cases, particularly involving Hmong Protestants, authorities have used provisions of the penal code that allow for jail terms of up to 3 years without trial for "abusing freedom of speech, press, or religion." There have been ongoing complaints that officials fabricated evidence and that some of the provisions of the law used to convict religious prisoners contradict the right to freedom of religion.

A 1997 directive on administrative probation gives national and local security officials broad powers to detain and monitor citizens and control where they live and work for up to 2 years if they are believed to be threatening "national security." In their implementation of administrative probation, some local authorities held persons under conditions resembling house arrest. The authorities use administrative probation as a means of controlling persons whom they believe hold independent opinions. Some local authorities cite "abuse of religious freedom" as a reason to impose administrative probation.

The authorities in the northwest provinces reportedly restricted the religious freedom of evangelical Protestants, including ethnic Hmong and ethnic Thai. The growth of Protestant house churches in ethnic minority areas continued to lead to

tensions with local officials, particularly in several border provinces. Several leaders of these churches, especially among the Hmong in the northwest and among ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands, reportedly were harassed or detained. The underground nature of the house churches, notably among ethnic minorities, has contributed to greater pressure on these groups and individuals. There are credible reports that house churches are tolerated or ignored in some places, especially in urban areas, but the extent and provincial locations in which this occurs are difficult to confirm. Provincial officials in certain northwest provinces, including Lai Chau and Son La, have reported that there are no churches or Buddhist pagodas at all. Reports of arrest and imprisonment for non-violent religious practice continue to persist, especially in large groups in contravention of local government edicts, because national security and national solidarity provisions in the Constitution override guarantees of religious freedom.

Hmong Protestant believer Mua Bua Senh of Lai Chau province died in July 2002 after reportedly being beaten in April 2001 and on two subsequent occasions by authorities. The Government conducted an investigation into the cause of his death and concluded that Senh died of natural causes, but it did not release the full report. Local officials reportedly beat him because he refused to either renounce his faith or leave his village. Senh's family, and four other families left their village after the first beating and eventually settled elsewhere. Senh was brought to Hanoi at one point for medical treatment, but for unclear reasons received little or no care. Senh's case was not reported until after his death.

Hmong Protestant Vang Seo Giao of Ha Giang province died on July 1 reportedly after being beaten by authorities at the office of the People's Committee in Che La Commune. A CPV member since 1990 who had recently converted to Christianity, Giao was reportedly beaten for reasons related to a refusal to renounce his faith and build an ancestral altar, and for refusing to drink alcohol. Giao's family and friends appealed to the Government and to the ECVN-North to investigate his death. In response to Embassy inquiries, Ha Giang provincial officials stated that Giao died in a flood.

Several detailed, but not entirely consistent reports describe a late December 2002 use of a noxious gas by local authorities to break up a Hmong Protestant worship service in the Lai Chau village where Mua Bua Senh initially sought refuge. Reports of casualties vary, but many indicate that several people required medical treatment and that one woman miscarried shortly afterwards. Provincial authorities initially acknowledged that something happened at the time and place the gas was reportedly used, but disputed the details of the reports. Later, they denied the reports entirely.

There were several unverifiable reports that ethnic minority Protestant believers detained as part of the Government's continuing response to the February and March 2001 unrest in the Central Highlands were killed while in custody during the reporting period. The most detailed reports involve three individuals supposedly given lethal injections. Later reports suggested that the three physically resisted receiving an unknown injection and that one or more of them may have been injured. The Government later reported that none of them were under detention. Subsequently there was another unverified report that one of the three died a few months later, although the cause of death is not known.

On numerous occasions throughout the country, small groups of Protestants belonging to house churches were subjected to arbitrary detention after local officials broke up unsanctioned religious meetings. There were many reported instances, particularly in remote provinces, in which Protestant house church followers were punished or fined by local officials for participation in peaceful religious activities such as worship and Bible study. According to credible reports from the Central Highlands, some local officials extorted goods, livestock, and money from Protestant believers. There were reports from the northwest and the Central Highlands of local officials driving ethnic minority persons out of their home villages for refusing to renounce their Protestant faith. The extent to which religious affiliation or other factors such as ethnicity or political activism caused these reported abuses cannot be determined, although many reports state that authorities cited religion as the reason for their actions.

Despite the Government's restrictions, the number of Protestants continued to grow. The repression of Protestantism in the Central Highlands is complicated by the presence of a group, the "Dega Protestants," that advocates a separate state for the indigenous persons who live in the area, particularly in southern Gia Lai and northwestern Dak Lak provinces. The Dega Protestants have links to a group residing in the U.S. that has proclaimed itself a Dega "government-in-exile." The Dega Protestants' relationship with the more apolitical Protestant believers in the area has deteriorated. The Dega Protestants reportedly have made threats against cer-

tain mainstream Protestant pastors. A small number of Protestant pastors in this area reportedly support the establishment of an autonomous "Dega" state; however, the more orthodox majority of Protestant pastors in the Highlands appear not to support such a political movement. In February and March 2001, ethnic minority groups apparently encouraged or organized by the Dega Protestants held widespread demonstrations in the Central Highlands provinces of Gia Lai and Dak Lak primarily to protest the loss of traditional homelands to recent migrants, who mostly were ethnic Vietnamese. On March 10, 2001, at a Protestant church in Plei Lau village in Gia Lai province, hundreds of soldiers and police clashed with hundreds of ethnic minority Protestants. Two or three soldiers reportedly shot and killed a civilian who had threatened another soldier with a spear. According to unconfirmed reports, in the immediate aftermath of the February/March 2001 demonstrations, between 1 and 5 persons were killed as a result of police actions, and allegedly hundreds were injured in beatings by authorities. Hundreds of persons were detained in February and March 2001. Most were released, but local police reportedly beat many of the detainees severely while they were in custody. It was difficult, if not impossible to confirm reports from the Central Highlands during the reporting period, but there were continued reports that dozens to as many as a few hundred people were in detention and that others have "disappeared." The latter may be in hiding, may have fled abroad or to other parts of Vietnam, or may have been in custody. Over 1,000 persons fled to Cambodia in 2001, but over 400 were repatriated, some apparently against their will.

Small outflows of ethnic minority highlanders—usually called "Montagnards" in French and English—seeking refugee status in Cambodia on religious grounds continued during the rating period, but, apparently at the request of Vietnam, many other Montagnards who sought to flee to Cambodia during the reporting period were repatriated by Cambodian authorities. At least eight Montagnards were sentenced in a one-day trial in December 2002 to terms of 8–10 years for organizing people to flee to Cambodia in the aftermath of ethnic unrest in 2001. Five ethnic Jarai in Gia Lai province were sentenced to terms of 5–6 years in March 2003, while nine Ede in Phu Yen received sentences of 18 months to 3 years for the same offense, according to local media. Government officials insist that these sentences are not related to any religious activities, although often their adherence to Dega Protestantism complicates the issue. The Government has allowed foreign observers into the area several times, but strict monitoring by government officials, police, or plainclothes security agents, made obtaining genuinely free and independent assessments of the situation in the area extremely difficult.

Protestants also reported that during the period covered by this report, authorities in Dak Lak, Gia Lai, and some nearby provinces detained, beat, and harassed numerous Protestant believers, often in conjunction with pressure to renounce their faith. In April 2002, officials reportedly cut off electricity to the homes of ethnic Ede villagers in Ea Trol village in coastal Phu Yen province after they refused to give up Christianity.

There have been unconfirmed reports of groups of inebriated youths beating religious believers at the instigation of authorities. There were credible but unconfirmed reports from multiple sources that local police tortured Protestant detainees in some instances. In December 2001, police in Buon Cuor Knia village in Dak Lak province reportedly beat and shocked with electric wires 12 Christians who had attempted to flee across the border to Cambodia.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's main response to the ethnic unrest in the Central Highlands was directed at supposed Dega Protestants. However, particularly in Dak Lak, authorities have made little differentiation between Dega and other Protestants. In October 2002, the SECV complained that authorities had forced about 400 Protestant congregations in Dak Lak to disband since 2001. The Catholic Bishop's council sent a very unusual complaint letter, apparently largely about the difficulties Christians were experiencing in the Central Highlands, to the Government and National Assembly in late 2002.

There were reports that from February 2001 through mid 2002 groups of vigilantes abducted and beat Protestant worshippers at non-recognized worship centers in some locations. According to one report, the Protestant churches in Ban Don district in Dak Lak province were closed following the February 2001 demonstrations; authorities allegedly have prevented all assembly for worship since that time. In early 2002, reports claimed that police intermittently broke up all non-sanctioned Protestant gatherings, including weddings and funerals, in Krong Pak district, Dak Lak province. A May 2003 report described efforts by authorities, with the stated intention to "eradicate Christianity," to force Protestants in Dak Song district in Dak Lak province to stop holding church gatherings of more than five persons.

The Government continued to isolate certain religious figures by restricting their movements and by pressuring supporters and family members. Thich Huyen Quang, the Supreme Patriarch of the UBCV, lived in Quang Ngai province under conditions resembling house arrest from 1982 until March 2003, when he traveled to Hanoi for medical treatment and a meeting with Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and other senior officials. He later traveled to Hue, HCMC, and other locations. While confined to the pagoda, he was not allowed to lead prayers or participate in worship as a monk, and his ability to receive visitors was limited. Those who met with him were often questioned by the police. Despite this, government officials have maintained that Thich Huyen Quang has been under no formal restrictions since 1997. Thich Huyen Quang has called for the Government to recognize and sanction the operations of the UBCV. On June 27 the Government lifted an administrative probation order on Thich Quang Do that was to expire in September 2003. Thich Quang Do visited Thich Huyen Quang in February 2001, after which HCMC police detained him twice and questioned him for a total of 6 hours, at one point forcing him to undergo a strip-search. In June 2001, authorities enforced the remainder of a 1998 5-year administrative surveillance order on Thich Quang Do by confining him to his living quarters under guard. The confinement was in response to his attempt to organize a group of monks and nuns to go to Quang Ngai province to take Thich Huyen Quang to HCMC. Except for meeting Thich Huyen Quang in April 2003, Thich Quang Do had not met any outsiders since June 2001, at least partly by his own choice. (Since the end of the period covered by this report, restrictions have been re-imposed on several UBCV members, including—on an extralegal basis—Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do.)

In February 2001, UBCV monks Thich Thai Hoa and Thich Chi Mau organized a "week of prayer" at Tu Hieu Pagoda in Hue City. Local authorities reportedly ordered public high school and college students to attend classes throughout the week, even on Sunday—traditionally a non-school day—in an attempt to prevent their attendance at the event. Persons who visited the pagoda during the week reported that security forces detained and questioned them at local police stations. In September 2001, UBCV lay follower Ho Tan Anh immolated himself to death in Da Nang. According to a letter left behind by Anh, he took this action to protest CPV policies towards the UBCV (particularly a campaign directed at UBCV followers in Quang Nam province that began in June 2001).

On March 17, 2001, Le Quang Liem, leader of the unofficial Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church (HHCBC), met with HHCBC Vice-Chairman Nguyen Van Dien and several other supporters in HCMC. Police placed Liem under administrative probation the next day after a day in police custody. Liem claims that he was beaten severely during that time. Police also detained, then released the other members of the group. Nguyen Van Dien was returned to his home province of Dong Thap and placed under a 2-year administrative probation order. Both Liem and Dien have now finished their detentions and are again free. On March 19 2001, 75-year-old unofficial Hoa Hao member Nguyen Thi Thu immolated herself to death at a village on the border between Dong Thap and Vinh Long provinces to support the Hoa Hao cause. It is unknown whether Thu was among those detained in HCMC on March 17, 2001.

Two Hoa Hao supporters, Truong Van Thuc and Nguyen Chau Lang were arrested on March 28, 2002 and sentenced to 3 years in prison. They were among 8 persons arrested for planning to organize a commemoration of the death of the Hoa Hao founder. Thuc was released in an amnesty in September 2002; six others had been released earlier. Only Nguyen Chau Lang remained in Xuan Loc camp, Dong Nai province serving a 3-year sentence at the end of the period covered by this report. He is described as being in good health. On April 14, 1999, police detained Ha Hai, the third-ranking officer of the HHCBC, in An Giang province and subsequently placed him under house arrest. Hai violated the house arrest order in November 2000, and was then arrested by HCMC police, and tried, and sentenced to 5 years in prison for abusing "democratic rights" on January 16, 2001. On November 28, 2000, a group of persons armed with clubs beat three of Hai's adult children who had visited the jail. The following day, several dozen persons protested the beatings at the police station. On December 7, 2000, during a clash between police and approximately 1,000 persons demanding Hai's release, Vo Hoang Van stabbed himself in the stomach and Mai Thi Dung slit her own throat. Both eventually recovered. Hai remains imprisoned in Xuan Loc camp, Dong Nai province.

In April 2001, Hoa Hao follower Bui Van Hue violated an administrative probation order, and crossed the border to Cambodia. In August 2001, he reportedly decided to apply to UNHCR for refugee status, but Cambodian police apprehended him and deported him back to Vietnam. In January 2002, a court in An Giang prov-

ince sentenced him to 3-years' imprisonment for violating the administrative probation order and for leaving the country illegally.

Hoa Hao believers stated that a number of their leaders remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report. Police arrested two Hoa Hao followers, Truong Van Duc and Ho Van Trong after a December 20, 2000 incident in which a group of persons and allegedly some police officers, attacked a group of Hoa Hao believers led by Le Quang Liem at a Hoa Hao festival. On May 20, 2001, Duc and Trong were tried, convicted, and received 12-year and 4-year prison sentences respectively. They remain imprisoned at Dinh Thanh camp, An Giang province.

On November 1, 2001, police in Cho Moi district of An Giang province ordered Hoa Hao monk Vo Thanh Liem (Nam Liem) to remove the Hoa Hao flag and photograph of the Hoa Hao founder that he had displayed in his pagoda. He refused and police remained at the pagoda for several days. On November 6, 2001 Liem climbed up a tree with a knife and a container of gasoline, threatening to kill himself if the police did not go away. After 3 days in the tree and a self-inflicted knife wound to his leg, Liem came down. He was not subjected to arrest or administrative detention.

Priests and lay brothers of the Catholic order Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix continue to face Government restrictions. Founded by Reverend Tran Dinh Thu in Bui Chu Diocese in 1953, the historically anticommunist order re-established its headquarters in Thu Duc District of HCMC in 1954. In 1988 police surrounded the 15-acre site and arrested all the priests and laypersons inside the compound. Father Thu was released in 1993 after serving nearly 5 years of a 20 year prison term. All but two others—Reverend Pham Minh Tri and layperson Nguyen Thien Phung—subsequently were released. Father Tri reportedly is in poor health; he and Phung remain imprisoned at Xuan Loc camp, Dong Nai province under 20 year sentences.

Two Cao Dai believers Ho Vu Khanh and Tran Van Nhi, were arrested in 1983 and received life sentences, later commuted to 20 years. Khanh completed his sentence on January 19 and was freed. Nhi received an amnesty in September 2000 and was freed. Another Cao Dai, Ngo Van Thong was arrested in 1977 and sentenced to death by a Tay Ninh provincial court; his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. He is believed to be in prison near Hanoi, but no recent news about him is available.

In February 2001 at Tu Hieu Pagoda, on the day before the start of the "week of prayer," Catholic Father Nguyen Van Ly, Hoa Hao elder Le Quang Liem, and Buddhist monks Thich Thien Hanh and Chan Tri met for the purpose of forming an interreligious body independent of government authority. Later in the same month, police surrounded Father Ly's church and placed him under administrative probation. His detention was reported widely in the state-controlled press, which identified him as a "traitor" for submitting written testimony critical of the Government to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. On May 16, 2001, allegedly as many as 300 police surrounded his church and arrested him. On October 19, 2001, the Thua Thien Hue Provincial People's Court convicted Father Ly and sentenced him to a total of 15 years in prison, 2 years for disobeying the administrative probation order, and 13 years for "damaging the Government's unity policy." Father Ly had called not only for religious freedom, but also for an end to one party rule. The Ha Nam provincial court reduced Father Ly's sentence by 5 years on July 16, 2003, in recognition of good behavior.

It is impossible to determine the exact number of religious detainees and religious prisoners. There is little transparency in the justice system, and it is very difficult to obtain confirmation of when persons are detained, imprisoned, tried, or released. Moreover, persons sometimes are detained for questioning and subsequently held under conditions amounting to house arrest using administrative probation regulations without being charged or without their detention being publicized. By the end of the period covered by this report, there reportedly were at least eight religious detainees who were held without formal arrest or charge; however, the number may be much greater. Unconfirmed reports suggest there may be over 100 other Protestants detained in the Central Highlands. Among those believed to be detained without having gone to trial are: Hmong Protestant Mua Say So (brother of the late Mua Bua Senh) in Lai Chau; Hmong Protestants Sinh Phay Pao, Va Sinh Giay, Vang Sua Giang, and Phang A Dong in Ha Giang province; Dinh Troi, an ethnic Hre Protestant detained in Quang Ngai in 1999; and Ama Ger and Ama Bion detained in Dak Lak in February 2001. A number of other UBCV, Cao Dai, Catholic, Hoa Hao, and Protestant dignitaries and believers had their movements restricted or were watched and followed by police.

Those persons believed to be imprisoned or detained at least in part for the peaceful expression of their religious faith as of June 2003 included: UBCV monk Thich

Thien Minh; Catholic priests Pham Minh Tri and Nguyen Van Ly, and Catholic layperson Nguyen Thien Phung; Cao Dai believer Ngo Van Thong; Hoa Hao laypersons Bui Van Hue, Nguyen Chau Lang, Ha Hai, Ho Van Trong, and Truong Van Duc. Hoa Hao leaders Le Quang Liem and Nguyen Van Dien remain under formal administrative detention (house arrest). Ethnic minority Thai Protestants Lo Van Hoa, and Lo Van Hen, and ethnic majority Kinh Protestant Nguyen Thi Thanh, were placed under administrative probation.

There were numerous reports that groups of vigilantes or "gangs of hoodlums" beat Protestant believers in the Central Highlands. On April 1, 2002, allegedly at the instigation of commune and district authorities, a "gang" in the predominantly Catholic village of Dak Chach, Dak La commune, Kon Tum province reportedly beat Protestant believers Du Van Anh and Y Thet (husband and wife) and pastor Dinh Van Truc for not renouncing their faith. Forced to flee the village soon after, Anh and Y Thet sought refuge in neighboring villages during 2002 and into early 2003, reportedly being expelled by village authorities each time. On April 14 2002, a "gang" in Buon Eu Sup village, Dak Lak, reportedly beat Protestant believer Siu Kret. His father complained to local police about the incident. The police fined the gang members $33 (VND 500,000) and a pig, but the victim's father had to swear to police he was not a Protestant believer in order to collect the compensation. In April 2001, assailants severely beat two ethnic Vietnamese female primary school teachers on their return from a Protestant service in Phu Nhon district in Gia Lai Province. There were dozens of additional specific reports of similar beatings in the area.

Forced Religious Conversion

On multiple occasions, local officials in several northwestern villages reportedly attempted to convince or force Hmong Protestants to recant their faith and to perform traditional Hmong religious rites such as drinking blood from sacrificed chickens mixed with rice wine. Local authorities reportedly also encouraged clan elders to pressure members of their extended families to cease practicing Christianity and to return to traditional practices.

Following the ethnic unrest in the Central Highlands in February/March 2001, there also were numerous reports of local authorities attempting to force ethnic minority Protestants to renounce their faith. In the villages of Druh, B'Le, B'Gha, V'Sek, Koyua, Tung Thang, Tung Kinh, and Dung in Ea H'Leo district of Dak Lak province, ethnic minority commune and district officials, some of whom are ethnic minorities themselves, were assigned to coerce Protestant followers symbolically to abandon Protestantism by drinking alcohol mixed with animal blood in a ritual called "the ceremony of repentance." In the villages of Buon Sup, Buon Ea Rok, and Buon Koya in Ea Sup district, Dak Lak province, ethnic minority Protestants were pressured to undergo a similar ritual recantation of faith. There were sporadic unconfirmed reports of this occurring in other instances during the period covered by this report.

In other provinces, authorities encouraged a "revival of traditional culture," which includes abandoning Christian beliefs. During the last week of May 2001, in Ninh Son district of Ninh Thuan province, officials reportedly gave a picture of Ho Chi Minh to each family in an ethnic Roglai community that had been selected to be upgraded to a "cultural village," with instructions to place the picture on an altar and burn incense in front of it. When four Christian families declined, they were threatened with banishment from the village.

According to what appears to be an official document from Khanh Hoa province, police in May 2002 convinced numerous households to abandon Protestantism and in some cases provided a cash reward, as part of efforts to stamp out "illegal" religious activities.

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The status of respect for religious freedom overall remained fundamentally unchanged during the period covered by this report. It improved in some areas, but remained poor or even deteriorated in the Central Highlands and Northwest Highlands. The Party resolution on religion acknowledged the legitimate role of religious groups in social and charitable activities and clearly ended any prohibitions on the profession of religious belief by Party members. However, it also reinforced that the Party should control religious groups, that their activities should take place within legally defined bounds, and that illegal religious activity would be suppressed. In March, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai had a widely publicized meeting with UBCV

Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, who was subsequently able to travel to Hue, HCMC, and Quy Nhon during the period covered by this report. He also met with foreign diplomats a number of times during the period covered by this report. UBCV deputy leader Thich Quang Do was released from administrative detention in June.

The SECV opened an official theological school with 50 students and informed the Government that it is training more students outside the school. Some leaders of non-recognized Protestant churches reported that they continued negotiating with the Government for recognition, although no new recognitions were granted. Some pastors also reported that police surveillance of their worship activities has declined or ended, in some cases as long ago as early 2001. Some also reported that they have been able to conduct training activities openly. Leaders of some Protestant house churches have been allowed to travel overseas on multiple occasions. Catholic leaders report that they are able to assign priests more easily than in the past, even in some remote areas where no priests had been assigned for decades. Attendance at religious services continued to increase during the period covered by this report. The number of Buddhist monks and Catholic priests also continued to increase. Local authorities in many parts of the country allowed religious organizations to engage in more charitable and social activities in line with the Party's new resolution. In addition, there was continued gradual expansion of the parameters for individual believers adhering to one of the officially recognized religious bodies to practice their faiths.

Several thousand prisoners benefited from early releases through general amnesties during the period covered by this report, but it is unknown whether any of them were imprisoned for reasons related to expression of their religious faith.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general there are amicable relations among the various religious communities, and there were no known instances of societal discrimination based on religion during the period covered by this report. The U.S. Mission in Vietnam is aware of only one claim of violence between religious groups, in which a Catholic gang beat a Protestant couple in April 2002, allegedly because of their religious beliefs. In HCMC, there were some informal ecumenical dialogs among leaders of disparate religious communities. Buddhists, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai reportedly sometimes cooperate on some social and charitable projects. Working level cooperation between the Catholic and Protestant churches occurs in many parts of the country. Various elements of the UBCV Buddhists, Catholics, Cao Dai, Protestant, and Hoa Hao communities appeared to network with each other; many of them reportedly formed bonds while serving prison terms at Xuan Loc.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in HCMC actively and regularly raised U.S. concerns about religious freedom with a wide variety of government officials, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, and other government offices in Hanoi, HCMC, and the provinces. During a visit to Vietnam, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom advocated for greater religious freedom and enquired about reported abuses with the Deputy Foreign Minister, the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, and Party intellectuals. He also met with leaders of various recognized religious groups. He also requested the government investigate the death of Mua Bua Senh. An Embassy officer requested that the Government release the report into Mua Bua Senh's death. Embassy and Consulate officials discussed religious freedom with Party officials and with leaders of mass organizations several times during the period covered by this report. All public organizations fall under the Vietnam Fatherland Front, which is in turn under the control of the Communist Party. Embassy and consulate officials also met with some of the Religious Council officials, which also falls under the Vietnam Fatherland Front, in their capacity as religious leaders as well as with all of the major religious groups, recognized as well as unregistered.

The U.S. Ambassador, the Deputy Chief of Mission, and other embassy officers have raised religious freedom issues with senior cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, two Deputy Prime Ministers, the Foreign Minister, senior Government and Communist Party advisors, the head of the Office of Religion, the Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Public Security, the chairpersons of Provincial People's Committees around the country, and other senior officials, particularly in the Central Highlands and the Northwest Highlands. The Consulate General and other consulate general officials also raised U.S. concerns about religious freedom with senior officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Public Security, with the

Government's Office of Religious Affairs, and with the Provincial People's Committee Chairpersons, Religious Affairs Committee officials, and Department of Public Security officials. Embassy and consulate general officials maintained regular contact with the key government offices responsible for respect for human rights. Embassy officers informed government officials that the lack of progress on religious problems and human rights are a significant impediment to the full normalization of bilateral relations. The Embassy's public affairs officer distributed information about the U.S. concerns regarding religious freedom to Communist Party and government officials.

In their representations to the Government, the Ambassador and other Embassy officers urged recognition of a broad spectrum of religious groups, including members of the UBCV, the Protestant house churches, and dissenting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. They also urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups. Embassy and consulate general officials also have focused on specific abuses and restrictions on religious freedom. The Ambassador repeatedly advocated freeing Thich Huyen Quang, Thich Quang Do, and Father Nguyen Van Ly. The Ambassador also requested that the Government investigate whether Khanh Hoa police had in fact encouraged Protestant believers to renounce their religion, and if so, to punish the responsible officials. The April 2001 recognition of the SECV followed direct advocacy by U.S. officials during the annual Human Rights Dialog and ongoing discussions involving the Ambassador, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and other U.S. officials. The Ambassador and other U.S. Mission officials in HCMC called on the Government to release Thich Quang Do from administrative probation and to allow Thich Huyen Quang to relocate to HCMC on humanitarian grounds. The Ambassador and other U.S. Mission officials expressed concern for Father Nguyen Van Ly during his detention. After Father Ly's sentencing, the Ambassador and other Embassy officials, noting the harshness of the sentence, called for his early release.

Representatives of the Embassy and the Consulate General met on several occasions with leaders of all the major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is. When traveling in the provinces, embassy and consulate general officers make a point of meeting with local Religious Affairs Committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers. In February 2001 and February 2002, a consulate general officer met with the government-sanctioned Hoa Hao Committee in An Giang province and maintained regular contact with Hoa Hao dissident Le Quang Liem and Hoa Hao elder Tran Huu Duyen. Mission officers met Cao Dai Archbishops affiliated with the pre-1975 Cao Dai leadership in February 2002. The Consulate General re-established contact with UBCV monk Thich Quang Do after the lifting of his administrative probation order in June 2003, and maintained regular contact with other UBCV Buddhists and officially recognized Buddhists. Embassy and consulate general officers have also maintained contact with leaders of the Central Buddhist Sangha. In May 2001, a consulate general officer met with the 95 year old founder of the Co-Redemptrix Order Father Tran Dinh Thu in HCMC. An embassy officer met with Thich Thai Hoa in Hue in September 2000. Embassy and consulate general officers met with the Catholic Archbishops of Hanoi, HCMC, and Hue as well as other members of the Episcopal Conference. The Ambassador and other mission officers met with outspoken priest Chan Tin on numerous occasions during the period covered by this report. The Ambassador also met with the Catholic Archbishops of Hanoi and HCMC. The Ambassador and Consul General attended an Easter sunrise service in 2002 in the Central Highlands that was conducted in two ethnic minority languages and presided over by the Bishop of Kon Tum. Embassy and consulate general officers also met repeatedly with leaders of various Protestant house churches and with leaders of the Muslim community.

The U.S. Government commented publicly on the status of religious freedom in the country on several occasions. The Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom and other U.S. officials discussed problems in religious freedom in Vietnam during the November 2002 Human Rights dialog in Washington, and warned that failure by the Government to improve conditions might lead to designation of Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. Senior U.S. officials repeated this warning on several occasions during the year.

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 is allowing already legalized groups more freedom. Other religious sources noted U.S. diplomatic intervention as a factor that contributed to the Government's improved treatment of Thich Huyen Quang.