

I. Challenges to Religious Freedom and Executive Summary Of Individual Country Reports

Challenges to Religious Freedom

This International Religious Freedom Report documents major developments with respect to religious freedom in 198 countries and territories from July-December 2010. The report reflects a broad understanding of universal religious freedom, one that includes the rights to hold private beliefs, including agnosticism or atheism, as well as the right to communal religious expression and education.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act) defines five types of violations of religious freedom: arbitrary prohibitions on, restrictions of, or punishment for (i) assembling for peaceful religious activities, such as worship, preaching, and prayer, including arbitrary registration requirements; (ii) speaking freely about one's religious beliefs; (iii) changing one's religious beliefs and affiliation; (iv) possession and distribution of religious literature, including Bibles and other sacred texts; and (v) raising one's children in the religious teachings and practices of one's choice.

This report documents numerous ways in which governments and societies violate religious freedom, including:

Active State Repression and Impunity: Governments often violate religious freedom through both intentional restrictions and the failure to prevent and prosecute societal violence and discrimination. Some governments, such as Iran and North Korea, seek to control religious thought and expression as part of a more comprehensive determination to control all aspects of political and civic life. Others intimidate and harass religious communities, or in severe cases like Eritrea, demand that adherents renounce their faith, or force them to relocate or flee the country. Still others discriminate against specific groups or favor one religion over others, as in Russia and Belarus. In France and Germany where religious freedom is protected by law, some public expressions of religion are restricted, and unequal treatment of some religious minorities occurs at the local level. Many states that have laws guaranteeing religious freedom still fall short in protecting minorities by failing to take steps to curb intolerance, attacks, or harassment. In countries such as Pakistan such impunity can exacerbate sectarian violence and empower those who attack religious minorities.

Violent Extremist Attacks: Violent extremist groups often exploit and inflame sectarian tensions. During the past year, al-Qaida issued calls for further violence against religious minorities in the Middle East; its declared affiliates took credit for attacks on religious minorities there and in South Asia. The last year saw attacks on Sufi, Shia, Ahmadiyah, and Christian holy sites and their worshippers in Pakistan. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the killing of Abdullah Haleem, the Director of Hajj and Religious Affairs in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in June 2011. In October 2010 in Iraq, terrorists affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq stormed the Sayidat al-Najat (Our Lady of Salvation) cathedral in Baghdad, killing at least 50 people. In Nigeria the last year has seen a sharp increase in the scale of violent extremists' attacks on Christians and Muslims, and sectarian violence in February 2011 led to an estimated 96 deaths.

Apostasy and Blasphemy Laws: Use, and in particular abuse, of apostasy and blasphemy laws have exacerbated abuses and discrimination against religious minorities and Muslims who promote tolerance, deepening the climate of impunity. In particular blasphemy and conversion from Islam, which is considered apostasy, are punishable by death in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Often apostasy and blasphemy laws are exploited to settle personal vendettas related to property or other resource-related disputes. In November 2010 Aasia Bibi became the first woman to be sentenced to death in Pakistan for blasphemy, after she reportedly refused to convert to Islam. She remained in custody while her case was on appeal. The government of Iran convicted reformers and peaceful protesters on the charge of moharebeh (understood as enmity against God, including blasphemy), a crime punishable by death. In Jordan converts from Islam may be denied their civil rights if any member of society files an apostasy complaint against them.

Repression of Religious Minorities: Religious minorities often face explicit bans or targeted harassment. In Egypt, Afghanistan, Sudan, Vietnam, and China, Christians face discrimination, violence, and government restrictions. Other often-targeted minorities include Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Ahmadis, and Bahais.

Anti-Semitism: Anti-Semitism continued or increased on every continent in the last year. Trends include increases in the traditional anti-Semitic actions and accusations that have plagued the world for millennia--including desecration of cemeteries, graffiti, and blood libel accusations--as well as Holocaust denial, revisionism, and glorification. There were also spikes in anti-Semitic expressions, including in cartoons, in both private and official media in several countries, such

as Poland, Spain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. Reaction to Israeli policy in the Middle East included the delegitimization and demonization of Israel. On November 19, 2010, vandals in Germany damaged more than 25 gravestones with anti-Semitic symbols and slogans at the historic Jewish cemetery in Wattenscheid (North Rhine-Westphalia). German authorities generally take action against the perpetrators of anti-Semitic offenses, and a police investigation into this incident is underway. On October 13, 2010, the government-affiliated Web site *Aporrea.com* in Venezuela published an article recommending the anti-Semitic book *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In the United Kingdom, media reported in 2010 that some part-time weekend schools and clubs taught approximately 5,000 pupils the official Saudi national curriculum, which contains anti-Semitic views, including an Arabic-language textbook that asks children to list the "reprehensible" qualities of Jews. In reaction to the reports, the British education minister rejected the use of anti-Semitic material in British schools.

Restrictions on Muslim Attire and Expression: Anti-Muslim sentiment and restrictions on religious expression continued in many parts of Europe. Bans on religious clothing and policies denying those wearing religious attire access to public spaces were expanded. In France the government approved legislation that prohibits covering the face in public, which in practice prohibits the niqab (face-covering veil) and the burqa (full-body covering). The French constitutional court ruled the law constitutional in October 2010; the first fines were levied under this legislation in April 2011, and authorities arrested two women for wearing niqabs in June. In eight states in Germany, teachers are not allowed to wear headscarves in schools while teaching non-religious curricula, and in one state, Hesse, civil servants are prohibited from wearing headscarves at work. In December 2010 the minister of education in Azerbaijan directed that students should not be allowed to wear the hijab while in school, although implementation has been inconsistent.

Restrictions Derived from Security and Related Concerns: A number of countries have recently passed or are considering laws that restrict religious freedom citing national security concerns. There are also increasing restrictions on the rights of religious communities that some governments label "sects" or threats. Some governments, including but not limited to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Azerbaijan, have banned or restricted Muslim groups they deemed extremist, such as the followers of theologian Said Nursi. The Syrian government has imprisoned many persons affiliated with religious groups it classified as extremist, including but not limited to the banned Muslim Brotherhood and groups that authorities loosely defined as Sunni Salafists. Minority religious groups, especially

Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists, are often identified as "sects," and continue to be viewed with suspicion in many countries.

Executive Summary of Individual Country Reports

The following summarizes July-December 2010 reports for a number of countries that face challenges in protecting religious freedom. The countries are listed in alphabetical order and those designated as "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPC) are noted.

Afghanistan

Non-Muslim minority groups, particularly Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and Bahai groups, which together constitute approximately 1 percent of the population, were targets of discrimination and persecution. The minority Shia community continued to face discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Authorities detained at least two converts from Islam to Christianity during the reporting period, although both have since been released. Television programming led to increased negative public opinion and suspicion of Christian activities and targeted violence and harassment against Christians, including converts from Islam. The Afghan Supreme Court ruled that membership in the Bahai Faith constituted blasphemy and that Muslims who convert to the Bahai Faith are apostates. Local Hindu and Sikh populations continued to encounter problems in obtaining land for cremation and harassment during major celebrations.

Burma (CPC)

Religious activities and organizations are subject to restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Hundreds of Buddhist monks remained in prison following a 2007 crackdown on prodemocracy demonstrations. The government promoted Theravada Buddhism over other forms of Buddhism or other religions, particularly among ethnic minorities. Christian groups continued to struggle to obtain permission to repair places of worship or build new ones. The regime continued to monitor and restrict Muslim activities and to restrict worship for other non-Buddhist minority groups. The government continued to refuse to recognize the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority as citizens and restricted their movement and marriage; Rohingyas also experienced severe legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. Adherence or conversion to Buddhism was an unwritten prerequisite for promotion to senior government and military ranks. Nearly all officers of the government and the armed forces are Buddhists.

China (CPC)

Only religious groups affiliated with one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register, hold worship services, and apply to offer social services. In October 2010 authorities prevented a large number of Christian leaders from unregistered churches from traveling to participate in the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in South Africa and reportedly subjected invitees to confiscation of passports, beatings, surveillance, and temporary detention. The government continued to implement measures that strictly regulate religious activity in the XUAR, including restricting private hajj pilgrimages and the wearing of Muslim headscarves in some areas. The government's repression of religious freedom remained severe in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas, particularly during "sensitive periods," such as the Shanghai World Expo and the Asian Games.

Egypt

The government failed to prosecute numerous perpetrators of violence against Coptic Christians. On November 24, 2010, a riot that began over a church in Amraniya led to the death of two Copts, reportedly caused by security forces, and nearly 70 injuries, including 18 police. Positive developments included prosecution of four alleged perpetrators of a January 2010 sectarian attack against Copts in Naga Hammadi and high-level government statements against sectarian violence. Nevertheless systemic harassment and discrimination against minorities continued. Many Christians and members of the Bahai Faith, which the government does not recognize, faced discrimination, especially in government employment and the ability to build, renovate, and repair places of worship. Authorities also arrested, detained, and harassed certain Muslims, such as Shia, Ahmadiyah, and Quranists; converts from Islam to Christianity; and members of other religious groups.

Eritrea (CPC)

The government continued to harass, arrest, and imprison thousands of believers. There were continuing reports that an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 members and pastors of unregistered churches were being detained without trial. Religious prisoners were reportedly held for long periods without due process and subjected to harsh treatment, including forced renunciations of faith, torture, and deaths in custody. Yemane Kahasay, of the Kale-Hiwot Church in Medefera, died in the Metier prison in July 2010 after reportedly being tortured for 18 months and denied medical treatment.

Iran (CPC)

Reports continued of government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religion. All non-Shiite religious groups were targeted, most notably Bahais, but also Sufis, Christians, Jews, and Shia who do not share the government's religious views. All religious minorities suffered varying degrees of officially-sanctioned discrimination, particularly in employment, education, and housing. Bahais reported arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, expulsions from universities, and confiscation of property. Government-controlled media intensified negative campaigns against Bahais and Christians.

Iraq

Violent extremist attacks on members of all religions continued. While the overall magnitude of sectarian violence declined during the reporting period, Muslims of all sects were victims of mass-casualty attacks. The government continued to respect the right of citizens to practice their religion, and provided additional security to Christian communities and sites of worship throughout the country following the October 31, 2010, attack on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, which was widely condemned by religious and political leaders. The Prime Minister pledged government funds to repair the church. The Kurdistan Regional Government declared its region a temporary safe haven for Christians wishing to flee Baghdad.

Nigeria

Violence and hostility between Christian and Muslim communities increased. The government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although local political actors stoked sectarian violence with impunity, occasionally using religion as a catalyst. Sectarian violence was particularly acute in the Middle Belt region, the boundary between the predominantly Muslim North and the Christian South. Religious differences often paralleled and exacerbated differences between ethnic groups.

North Korea (CPC)

The government of the Democratic Republic of North Korea continued to violate individuals' right to choose and practice their religious faiths. The government reportedly used authorized religious entities for external propaganda and political purposes and barred citizens from entering places of worship. Some foreign visitors stated that church services appeared staged and included political content supportive of the government.

Pakistan

The government did not reform a blasphemy law that had been used to prosecute those who belong to religious minorities, and in some cases Muslims who promote tolerance. The government also used provisions of the penal code to prevent Ahmadis from practicing their religion. Members of other Islamic sects, Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus also reported governmental and societal discrimination. Despite some government steps to protect religious minorities, the government largely failed to take measures that could prevent societal intolerance and violence against religious minorities and Muslims promoting tolerance. The government of Pakistan rarely prosecuted perpetrators of extremist attacks, deepening the climate of impunity. The public discourse on the blasphemy laws intensified, which increased the government's reluctance to address them, and it distanced itself from a bill introduced by a member of the ruling party to amend the blasphemy laws to prevent abuse.

Russia

In 2010 the government brought criminal cases for the first time against individuals in possession of banned religious literature. Although conditions remained largely unrestricted for religious groups authorities deemed "traditional," the government continued to restrict the religious freedom of several "non-traditional" groups. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fell into four categories: registration of religious organizations; access to places of worship (including access to land and building permits); visas for foreign religious personnel; government raids on religious organizations; and detentions of individuals.

Saudi Arabia (CPC)

The public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited. There is no separation between state and religion, and the deep connection between the royal family and the religious establishment results in significant pressure on all citizens to adhere to the official government interpretation of Islam. The Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (the religious police) and ministry of interior forces continued to raid private non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim religious gatherings and confiscated the personal religious materials of some non-Muslims. Many non-Muslims reportedly worshiped in secret because of continuing fear of harassment, detention, or deportation. Shia Muslims (who comprise approximately 10-15 percent of the population), and some other Muslims who do not adhere to the government's interpretation of Islam, faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, restrictions on religious practice, and restrictions on places of worship

and community centers. Shia in the Eastern Province are also subject to arbitrary arrests.

Sudan (CPC)

(Note: The report covers the period prior to the July 11, 2011, independence of The Republic of South Sudan.)

In the North, the Government of National Unity (GNU) generally did not respect religious freedom in law or practice, and there were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The GNU continued to favor Islam and place some restrictions on religious minorities in the North. However, laws providing for imprisonment or death as punishment for conversion from Islam, and laws calling for imprisonment for blasphemy and defaming Islam were rarely enforced. The GNU has never carried out a death sentence for apostasy. It did occasionally subject converts to ostracism or intimidation or encouraged them to leave the country. The Government of Southern Sudan respected religious freedom, and there were no reports of abuse based on religious belief or practice in Southern Sudan.

Tajikistan

The government banned religious groups it classified as "extremist" and the ministry of education banned wearing the hijab in schools and universities. Only Muslim men were permitted to go to mosques. The 2009 Law on Religion expanded the government's power to regulate religious communities and required all registered religious organizations to re-register by January 2010. Most religions completed re-registration by the deadline, although at least 28 mosques were "temporarily closed" by the government, and local officials reportedly obstructed efforts to register some new churches. The president ordered all students studying religion in foreign madrassahs without government approval to return to the country.

Turkmenistan

The government placed restrictions on both registered and unregistered religious groups. During the reporting period, the government registered one Muslim group, but denied registration to several others. Registered groups could not own property, print, or import religious materials. A Protestant pastor was convicted of extortion in a trial that reportedly involved serious procedural deficiencies. Authorities reportedly raided and arbitrarily detained members of Jehovah's Witnesses and continued to arrest and imprison members who conscientiously objected to military service.

Uzbekistan (CPC)

The law restricts the religious freedom of unregistered groups and prohibits many activities, such as proselytizing. Heavy fines and short jail terms were imposed on violators from minority religious groups. The government continued to deal harshly with Muslims who discuss religious issues outside of sanctioned mosques but did not interfere with worshippers at sanctioned mosques. Traditional religious groups, including Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Russian Orthodox congregations, were permitted to operate.

Venezuela

Jewish leaders expressed concern about anti-Semitic expressions in official and government-affiliated media. For example on July 13, *Diario Vea* published a political cartoon depicting the Israeli foreign minister with half his face as Adolf Hitler, holding up his hand tattooed with a skull with sharp teeth and an Israeli flag on its forehead. Such expressions often increased following government criticism of Israeli government policies or actions.

Vietnam

In Vietnam the record was mixed. The government allowed hundreds of new places of worship to be built. But significant problems remained, especially at the provincial and village levels. These included slow, or no, approval of registration for some groups, including unrecognized Hoa Hao Buddhists and Protestant groups in the North and Northwest highlands. There were also reports of harsh treatment of detainees after a protest over the closing of a Catholic cemetery in Con Dau parish. Moreover, the government re-imprisoned Father Nguyen Van Ly, a Catholic human rights defender who had been paroled 16 months earlier after suffering a series of strokes while being held in solitary confinement.

U.S. ACTIONS IN SELECT COUNTRIES

The United States actively promotes freedom of religion as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability throughout the world. We do this through relationships with foreign governments, outreach to religious communities and civil society, public diplomacy, support for defenders of religious freedom, and targeted assistance programs. To help shape our policies, the State Department vigorously monitors and reports on these issues, both in this annual report and through our diplomatic reporting and analysis. The Department of State is integrating promotion of religious liberty and tolerance with broader U.S. diplomacy, defense, and development efforts. We have expanded training in

promoting human rights and religious freedom at the Foreign Service Institute for officials from all U.S. agencies.

The IRF Act provides an important mechanism to motivate improvements in countries with systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. The Secretary of State designates as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom." Following the designation, a period of negotiation may ensue, during which the United States seeks to work with a designated country to bring about improvements. When appropriate, the Department of State may apply sanctions for particularly severe violations of religious freedom, or sanctions may be waived to further the purposes of the IRF Act or to further the national interest. The Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, located in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and headed by the Ambassador at Large, works with officials in the Department and our embassies overseas throughout the year to advance religious freedom in each CPC.

Secretary Clinton designated eight countries as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan. The Secretary applied CPC sanctions to six of these: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan.

Around the world, U.S. officials emphasized the importance of religious freedom with other government officials, private citizens, scholars, and international business and media representatives. When U.S. officials learned of difficulties religious groups or individuals faced in China, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or elsewhere, they intervened where possible, engaging government officials and attending trials. Through statements, speeches, United Nations resolutions, and publications, U.S. officials also called on governments--including China, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan--to increase respect for religious freedom and release prisoners of conscience.

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran and North Korea, but advocates for an end to government abuses through public statements and private and multilateral diplomatic channels. We call on other countries that have bilateral relations with Iran and North Korea to use those ties to press for human rights, including religious freedom. In some countries, such as Eritrea, government authorities rebuffed repeated attempts by U.S. officials to discuss abuses of religious freedom.

In many countries, U.S. officials engage with civil society, including faith-based and interfaith groups, to support their efforts to foster respect between all communities and therefore to increase respect for religious freedom. In Sudan U.S. officials met regularly with leaders from Muslim and Christian groups in Khartoum, Juba, and elsewhere, noting the importance of religious tolerance and the extent of U.S. interest and concern. The embassy and consulate general in Vietnam held several roundtables to discuss religious freedom with recognized Protestant churches and unrecognized "house" churches.

As part of our overall effort to combat religious intolerance, in February 2011, the Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism and the Special Representative to Muslim Communities launched the 2011 Hours Against Hate initiative. This global campaign encourages young people to combat racial, ethnic, and religious bigotry by volunteering their time. Through social media and events around the world, young people are asked to pledge hours of their time to help or serve people who do not look like them, pray like them, or live like them. The goal of 2,011 hours has been surpassed many times over--more than 10,000 hours have been committed to combating hate.

During the reporting period, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism and the Special Representative to Muslim Communities met with government, community, and religious leaders to investigate and combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Venezuela, and Argentina, among others. In addition, U.S. officials in many countries, including Spain, Hungary, Ukraine, and Germany, tracked anti-Semitic incidents, spoke out against anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim expression, and other hate speech directed against religious communities, and urged all parties to do the same.

The Department of State and its embassies also promote respect for religious freedom and diversity through public diplomacy and outreach programs. The United States funded travel by local journalists, academics, politicians, government officials, religious scholars, community leaders, women, youth, and NGO officials from many countries, including Afghanistan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Niger, to engage with their U.S. counterparts. On November 10 Representative Keith Ellison--the first Muslim elected to Congress--participated in an outreach event with 85 young civil society leaders in Morocco, where he discussed Islam in America.

U.S. assistance programs also promote respect for religious freedom and diversity. They train religious groups, civil society, lawmakers, and government officials to

develop legal and policy protections for religious freedom; address expressions of intolerance that restrict religious liberty and combat anti-Semitism; increase public awareness; and strengthen religious leaders' capacity to promote faith-based cooperation across religious lines.

U.S. officials engage civil society and populations to promote respect for universal rights with a focus on women, youth, and persons with disabilities. We are increasing our efforts to engage youth through assistance programs and public diplomacy, such as Town Hall meetings that visiting U.S. officials host in various countries. A U.S. program promotes religious freedom through a documentary competition among Iraqi youth focused on Iraq's pluralistic religious heritage. The Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) also works with civil society groups in the region to promote tolerance and respect for diversity, especially among youth. For example one MEPI project works with media outlets to broadcast messages that reject extremism and violence and encourage positive inter-religious dialogue. The Special Advisor for International Disability Rights is promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities across the work of the State Department, including in the area of religious freedom.

To advance religious freedom globally, the United States works with multilateral partners in the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations on global, regional, and country-specific threats to this universal right. For example U.S. officials participated in a July 2010 conference in Kazakhstan organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to promote tolerance. The United States has worked to address intolerance and promote religious freedom through the UN Human Rights Council. The U.S. government has publicly condemned Iran's treatment of the Bahais in UN resolutions, and in December 2010, for the eighth year in a row, the U.S. government cosponsored a successful UN General Assembly resolution condemning Iran's ongoing and severe human rights abuses, which included egregious violations of its international commitments with respect to religious liberty. In December the UN General Assembly also adopted a resolution, cosponsored by the United States that condemned North Korea's poor human rights record, expressing "very serious concern" at the persistence of reports of "systemic, widespread, and grave violations of human rights." The United States uses every opportunity at multilateral fora to urge all governments to respect our shared commitment to the universal rights of thought, conscience, and religion.

This Annual Report on International Religious Freedom is one important tool to fulfill that commitment. The report's comprehensive review of the status of

religious freedom in countries and territories around the world is intended not simply to inform. We publish it also to expose violators to international scrutiny and to engender greater international consensus on the importance of safeguarding the rights of all people to profess, practice, and promote their beliefs. We also hope it will foster accountability in these countries for past abuses and help prevent future violations.

[Addendum: Events Occurring Since the Reporting Period \(July-December, 2010\)](#)